

# HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Volume 33 : Number Three : Fall 2012



## ISSUES IN FORMATION

Positive Psychology and Formation

Entitled Ministers or Servant-Leaders?

Lessons for Formation in the John Jay  
Studies

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# HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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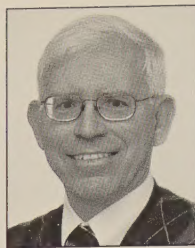
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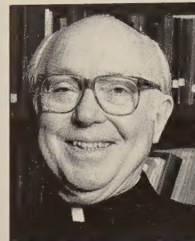
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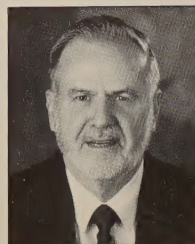
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Manuscripts are received with the understanding that they have not been previously published and are not currently under consideration elsewhere. Feature articles should be limited to 4,500 words (15 double-spaced pages), with no more than 6 recommended readings; filler items of between 500 and 1,000 words will be considered. All accepted material is subject to editing. When quoting the Bible, the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible is preferred.

Authors are responsible for the completeness and accuracy of proper names in both text and bibliography. Acknowledgments must be given when substantial material is quoted from other publications. Provide author name(s), title of article, title of journal or book, volume number, page(s), month and year, and publisher's permission to use material.

Letters are welcome and will be published as space permits and at the discretion of the editors. Such communications should not exceed 600 words and are subject to editing.

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## 27 A Starting Point for Formation Toward Celibate Chastity

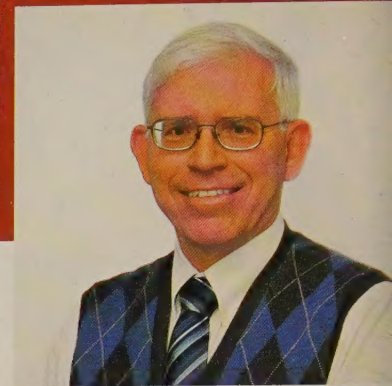
### CONTENTS

- 2** Editor's Page
- 3** Modern Positive Psychology and Formation  
Tina Buck, M.S. and Robert J. Wicks, Psy.D.
- 8** Lessons for Seminary Formation Found in the Pages of the John Jay Studies  
Monica Applewhite, Ph.D.
- 15** Understanding Narcissistic Problems: A Guide to the Basics  
Vincent J. Lynch, Ph.D.
- 20** Entitled Pastoral Ministers or Servant-Leaders?  
Mary Elizabeth Kenel, Ph.D.
- 27** A Starting Point for Formation Toward Celibate Chastity  
William A. Barry, S.J.
- 32** The 2005 Vatican Instruction on Homosexuality in Seminaries  
Thomas G. Plante, Ph.D., A.B.P.P.
- 37** Responding to Fear in These Troubled Times  
Len Sperry, M.D., Ph.D.
- 42** Quiet Yeast  
Margaret Cessna, H.M.
- 44** An Outburst of Poets  
James Torrens, S.J.
- 46** Leadership From the Inside Out  
Mary Navarre, O.P.



# Editor's Page

## Current Issues in Formation



This issue of **HUMAN DEVELOPMENT** focuses on "Current Issues in Formation." While the six articles addressing this topic have relevance for the formation of religious and lay ministers, as well as for the ongoing formation of all in ministry, their focus is on seminary formation. When I asked our advisory board for suggestions for a theme about a year ago, this topic arose independently from many of them, including members working in Africa and Australia. The impetus was drawn from their direct engagement in seminary formation work and from a number of external factors.

It is now more than ten years since the *Boston Globe's* first investigation in January 2002 of sexual abuse in the Archdiocese of Boston and the approval of the U.S. bishops' document *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* in June of that same year. During those ten years the John Jay College of Criminal Justice conducted research on the sexual abuse crisis at the request of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. They released two studies. The first, "The Nature and Scope of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests and Deacons in the United States 1950-2002," was published in 2004 and the second, "The Causes and Context of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests and Deacons in the United States 1950-2010" was released just last year in 2011. Additionally, in 2005 the Vatican's Congregation for Catholic Education published "Instruction Concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with Regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies in View of Their Admission to the Seminary and to Holy Orders."

Much has been written about these studies and documents and much has already been done to implement their findings in the evaluation of seminary applicants and in their subsequent formation. It was the desire of our advisory board to highlight these advances in this issue of **HUMAN DEVELOPMENT** and to point to further work yet to be done. There necessarily will be attention paid to the many challenges and problems that formators face, but as Robert Wicks and Tina Buck point out in our lead article, "It is essential to remember, however, that it is only one road and must never be the sole avenue. If it becomes so, the danger will be a lack of recognition, respect, and appreciation for the graces given and received from God. Focusing only on the negative can also lead to undue discouragement."

While this issue examines important concerns for those involved in formation work, we recognize that there are many among our readers who, though interested in this subject, are not involved in formation ministry. As one among

them, I share a few broad reflection points that I derived in editing this issue.

- *We are all involved in formation.* While it may not specifically be ministry formation, we are all formators of one kind or another—in our immediate or extended families, workplaces, parishes and schools. We all contribute, positively or negatively, to making the lived environment a place of human development in all its forms. And we too are being formed by those around us.
- *Formation is both conscious and unconscious.* We are often unaware of the impact we are having on others. We each have a tremendous potential to influence, inspire and teach others simply by the way we conduct ourselves each day. Most of us could readily identify influential people in our lives whose impact was often made in unspoken and unacknowledged ways.
- *Formation can be difficult.* Tension, disagreement and conflict inevitably arise in the course of our relationships. These are formative moments. How we handle them shapes us and those we relate to and can have long-lasting effects. So can the failure to deal with negative emotions and conflict.
- *Formation is a spiritual process—both for the formator and the one being formed.* While there are psychological and behavioral dimensions to formation, these relationships have great spiritual potential. When the level of intimacy is appropriate and the freedom of the other is respected, there is the opportunity to discern God's presence and call in these relationships.

All types of formation require generosity, humility and integrity. When these virtues are practiced with honesty and respect formation is all the more fruitful. We hope this issue of **HUMAN DEVELOPMENT** will enhance all of our readers' appreciation for the work of formation, whether in formal settings like a seminary or in the informal engagements that take place around the dinner table. The dynamics are often the same.

*Robert M. Hamma*

Robert M. Hamma



Tina Buck, M.S. and Robert J. Wicks, Psy.D.

# MODERN POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY AND FORMATION:

*Unearthing the Gifts and Graces of the People of God  
and those Called to Servant Leadership*



*"The greatest good you can do for another is not just to share your riches but to reveal to him his own."*

*Benjamin Disraeli*

For a long time, spiritual formation has involved raising the volume to the negative inclinations of an individual's personality. This is not surprising because a good awareness of our tendencies to do harm or to sin is a road that can lead to greater holiness, inner freedom and compassion. It is essential to remember, however, that it is only one road and must never be the sole avenue. If it becomes so, the danger will be a lack of recognition, respect and appreciation for the graces given and received from God. Focusing only on the negative can also lead to undue discouragement.



Psychology has appreciated this reality over the past ten years as well. Psychotherapy and counseling are no longer viewed as being merely a repair shop for people. Now, instead of solely trying to fix what is perceived to be wrong in a person's style of thinking, interacting and overall behavior, the approach has become more balanced, rich and holistic. Consequently, there is a strong interest in helping people not only appreciate where they have gone wrong but just as importantly to deeply understand, prize and share their talents. This is essential if true flourishing and deep compassion are to become possible and retain their potency.

Although there are many aspects of positive psychology that can help provide such a basis for insight into this focus (see Recommended Reading), one of the main ones provided here is helping those we guide to better unearth and cultivate their strengths.

Clifton and Hodges (2004) help in this regard by providing the following definition:

A strength is the ability to provide consistent, near-perfect performance in a given activity. The key to building a strength is to first identify your dominant themes of talent, then to discover your specific talents within those themes, and lastly to refine them with knowledge and skills.

## IDENTIFYING STRENGTHS

Some strengths and talents may be readily apparent such as the student who can organize and lead a group of individuals to accomplish a task whether it is in a science lab or at a campus-wide rally. Another may be able to electrify an audience because of his ability to speak clearly and passionately about his area of interest or expertise. For others, personality clues may have to be sorted to determine predominant strengths. Buckingham and Clifton (2001) cite spontaneous reactions, yearnings, rapid learning and satisfaction as possible ways of identifying talent. In other words, what are their gut reactions, what are they drawn to doing, how quickly can they pick up a new skill and what makes them happy?

A resource designed by Peterson and Seligman (2004) called the *Character Strengths and Virtues Classification System* is worth consulting since it offers a means of assessment in positive psychology. (It is similar to the way the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual IV* offers diagnostics for mental health based on the medical model of disease.) Specifically naming and deliberately cultivating what is inherently good in those who are in formation contributes to their resilience, meaning and happiness. Briefly, the system isolates seven key characteristics of a strength that are: consistently evident and stable over time; valued by society; nurtured by caregivers; promoted through structured institutions such as schools; recognized and highly considered by most major cultures and identified as being a role model or prodigy.

In Peterson and Seligman's (2004) guide, six virtues are identified and divided into twenty-four sub-categories representing character strengths:

*Wisdom and Knowledge* combined represent the mental fitness to solicit and utilize information. Suggested strengths include: curiosity, interest, love of learning, judgment, critical thinking, open-mindedness, practical intelligence, creativity, originality, ingenuity and perspective.

*Courage* is the emotional tenacity that drives achievement regardless of the obstacles. Strengths highlighted are valor, industry, perseverance, integrity, honesty, authenticity, zest and enthusiasm.

*Love* is self-sacrifice for another. Strengths involve intimacy, reciprocal attachment, kindness, generosity, nurturance, social intelligence, personal intelligence and emotional intelligence.

*Justice* references the desire to complete civic duties that contribute to the larger whole. This includes citizenship, duty, loyalty, teamwork, equity, fairness and leadership.

*Temperance* refrains from excess and includes strengths such as forgiveness, mercy, modesty, humility, prudence, caution, self-control and self-regulation.

*Transcendence* ties to that which is greater than the self and gives humankind purpose. Strengths include awe, wonder, appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, optimism, future-mindedness, playfulness, humor, spirituality, sense of purpose, faith and religiousness.

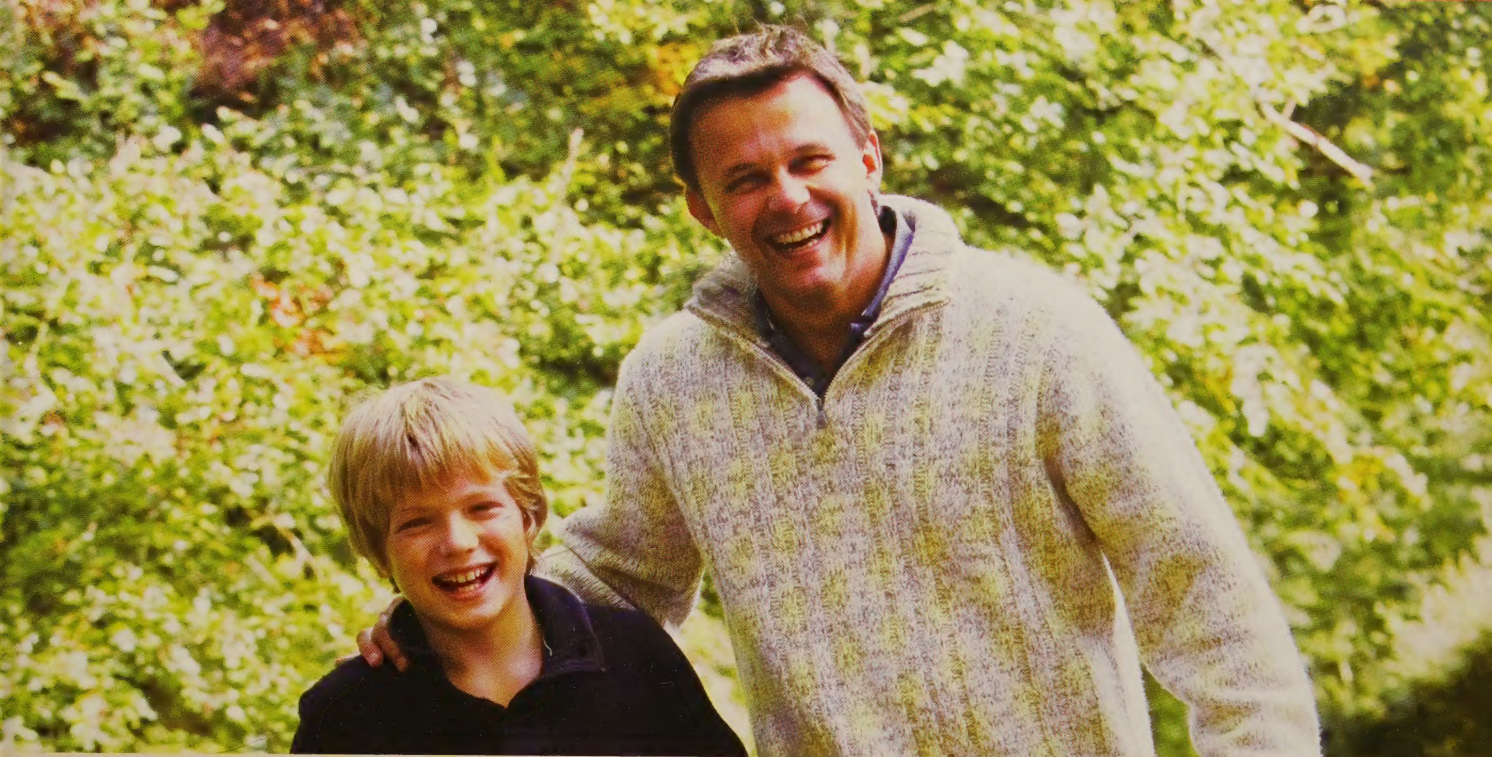
This list represents a framework for further discussion. In line with this, a sampling of the interventions to strengthen positive traits described by Peterson and Seligman (2004) are noted as follows:

- Brainstorming ideas for an express purpose promotes creativity.
- Taking risks, adapting and questioning are ways of building courage.
- Incorporating fun encourages perseverance.
- Participating in community service promotes social responsibility.
- Offering accurate feedback encourages humility and modesty, if it is stated in a manner that allows the individual to grow.
- Laughing brings about playfulness.
- Thanking others for no reason at all grows gratitude.
- Practicing forgiveness of self and others strengthens relationships.

Many of these activities can be expanded to include a larger community whether it is the priesthood, religious life or the parish.

Another way to look at strengths in depth is to complete "A Questionnaire for Self-Reflection on Personal Strengths and Virtues" found in Robert Wicks' book *Bounce* (2006). These questions are designed to inspire self-exploration and whet the appetite to delve further into the subject. There is also a list of potential strengths to stimulate thought. Likewise, in *Streams of Contentment* (2011), Wicks outlines a 30-day retreat designed to indulge oneself for five minutes a day to gain greater clarity, compassion and contentment. The mere practice of identifying strengths and offering examples of how





they have been used can be extremely gratifying for those in formation. For those who have been in ministry for years, sometimes it is also good to be reminded of all the gifts that God has given—some of which may have fallen out of practice and may need to be used now.

## DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP TRAITS

The ability for people to be proficient at something or perhaps even an expert contributes to happiness and well-being. Thus, finding ways for those wishing to serve in ministry to practice in real life is essential for instilling confidence and supporting mastery. Dieter Frey (1995) developed "Frey's Principles of Leadership and Motivation" which highlighted central themes that positively influenced employee satisfaction and performance in the workplace. These principles are an outgrowth of human strengths and offer a framework for another way of intervening in formation. Likewise, the questions that follow can offer a valuable source of direct application and ongoing introspection. The principles are as follows:

*Providing meaning and vision:* People who perceive their work as having a greater purpose and tied to a

larger strategy are more motivated and enthusiastic about what they do. (How do persons in formation see their role in ministry? How do their strengths benefit the organization? How clearly are they able to link their actions to the broader strategy of the church or organization?)

*Transparency:* Being informed helps people to have a sense of control and provides a framework for change. (Are the discussions with others in the community open and honest? Can constructive criticism be shared and valued? Is this echoed in their organization?)

*Participation and Autonomy:* People who actively contribute to the decision-making process are more likely to assume responsibility. (What are the expectations of the formation relationship? Are both parties invested and willing to work diligently together? What does this look like in their ministry?)

*Sense of Fit:* If people understand their strengths and use them to do the work they love, they will be more motivated to keep doing it. (Do they have the skills necessary and the interest? What are their motivations? Are they a good fit for the type of ministry they are proposing?)

*Goal Setting and Goal Negotiation:* People who establish reasonable goals and develop a plan to meet them tend to

be more motivated. (Are there specific goals established for the formation experience? Is there enough flexibility to re-evaluate the goals as necessary and resources to accomplish what is laid out? How does their church or organization view this type of planning?)

*Constructive Feedback and Appreciation:* People want to do well and be recognized. Likewise, positive correction builds people and their skills. (Is there room for an ongoing appraisal individually and of the relationship as a whole? Is this support echoed in their place of work?)

*Professional and Social Integration:* People want to be part of a community and acknowledged for their contributions. (How is this need fulfilled in the formation experience? How do formators model professionalism and integration in their lives?)

*Personal Growth:* People want to expand their skills and knowledge. (How is growth being encouraged in each person in formation?)

*Situational Leadership:* Leadership style is adaptable to the event and should be clear and directive. (Is leadership an innate strength? How is it being developed?)

*Fair and Equitable Material Reward:* This suggests that rewards should be clearly articulated and commensurate with the investment. (In the world's



*Conducting  
an honest  
self-assessment  
is a foundational  
step to using  
positive psychology.*

terms this means money and power. What does it mean in ministry? What are the tangible and intangible rewards?)

These principles are also relevant to working within a congregation. How would these questions be answered by members of the parish? How does the church help them to meet a need or contribute to the world in a meaningful way?

#### APPLYING POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

We have suggested exploratory questions to guide discussion about growth, mastery, and contentment. This rich body of information can be leveraged throughout the formation process and beyond. Several applications follow including:

- Doing a self-assessment
- Making a choice
- Practicing
- Paying it forward
- Partnering with others
- Viewing each day as the last.

Although there are benefits to doing these activities individually, they are designed to be done collectively so new discoveries can be made and ongoing refinement occurs.

*Conducting an honest self-assessment* is a foundational step to using positive psychology. A fair appraisal of strengths, growing edges and attitude is necessary to make minute and incremental improvements. Based on the answers from the questions, what rises to the top? Do they characterize life as full of opportunity or a problem to endure? If a positive mindset is in place, then determine if it is consistent across all domains or if there are situations/individuals that are draining. For example, does lack of sleep or stress impact reactions? If so, review self-care protocols or institute them. If an individual is exhausted, how can interactions be limited or changed to create better outcomes? If a negative mindset is more the norm, rewiring takes time and patience, but is well worth the effort.

*Choice* is the key driver in using positive psychology. In other words, choose to employ strengths in life and use the lens of positivity to view all that happens. Often people are trapped

in a thought process that says, "I have to do it this way or if I can just survive this, I can get to the next better thing." This thought process influences our behavior consciously and unconsciously. We may procrastinate, worry about something that is out of our control or be wrought with anxiety that far outweighs the actual situation. In essence, we are robbing ourselves of joy when we do not recognize that we can govern our behavior.

Take a moment to consider all of the things that are obligations on the calendar. How can they become opportunities to learn something new and grow? Also, consider what tasks are done well and liked. Many people can be trained to do things so well that they can be perceived as strengths; however, they may not enjoy spending hours in those activities. This is often true in the workplace where people must adapt to retain their employment. Thus, determine how more time can be spent doing activities that utilize signature strengths. For example, teaching and preaching a sermon may energize, while for others visiting parishioners at their bedsides gives them meaning.

*Practicing* is another key concept. Cultivating strengths by employing them often and using them in unique ways is critical. Also consider how a positive attitude impacts the way a strength is used or how a negative attitude may minimize what is inherently good. It is easy to start complaining when everyone else in the room is doing so and to be swept away by hopelessness in difficult, tragic or chronic situations. Yet, those individuals who can draw something of value from any situation have a tendency to do better and remain healthier than those who cannot. Practice by looking for the good in self, others and events. For example, people often make negative comments on the weather. One of the authors has found herself pre-empting this negativity by remarking on what a gorgeous day it is, regardless of whether it is raining, snowing or shining. Most agree!

Whenever possible, include others by *paying it forward*. Strengths used to benefit a community have a tendency to grow because they are called upon more frequently and praised. Likewise, individuals who can highlight the strengths



of others give gifts of immeasurable worth. Many of the authors' clients come to us with great hurts and often few nurturing deposits from caregivers. We have found that helping them to see their courage for walking through the therapy door, their tenacity for continuing their visits and their strength in working through the challenges as instrumental in beginning the healing process.

People called to ministry have a unique opportunity to pour grace into others abundantly. Compliment at least one person a day about something that makes him or her special. One way of doing this is looking at the details. Does a parishioner wear a hat celebrating his service to our country or an organization pin on her lapel? Both suggest a willingness to sacrifice and serve others, which are incredible gifts. Another way is catching people in the act of doing good. For example, one of the authors was out to dinner with her family and saw a young father with three boys ranging in age from about five to ten. It was a busy evening and they waited a long time for their food. As we left, I complimented the father and his sons on how impressed I was with their kind and caring behavior to each other. Dad sat up a bit straighter and thanked me. Each of the boys beamed. That was a fleeting interaction, but for those few moments we enjoyed what was strong and good in their family.

There are many people around who would be pleased to share what they know and to partner with us. The easiest way to improve upon a strength is by joining another who desires the same. This can occur in two ways. First, choose a partner whose skill is a few levels higher so growth, not frustration, occurs. Second, find someone to teach. If positivity is a struggle, spend time with people who have that perspective. Consider how they act, speak and carry themselves. Observe how they make others feel when they are with them. Then imitate what they do or adapt it. Some of this may be awkward at first, but it will become more natural over time.

Finally, view each day as the last. Our lives are finite, yet we often act as if they are eternal. We allow anger to fester, deny forgiveness and foster

dysfunction. We toss away precious moments surfing the net or watching television instead of investing in relationships. Would that be true if we knew that this was our last day on earth? Chances are good that a few things would change and we would focus on making good memories and getting closure. Make a commitment to stop and be mindful throughout the day. Choose to operate from a source of strength. Choose words and act in ways that build others up.

## CONCLUSION

Offering guidance to those being formed for ministry is a privilege. By integrating aspects of positive psychology, including contentment, growth and mastery into these relationships, gifts of untold value may be unwrapped, and a balanced picture of those in formation may be gained (one that names both gifts and growing edges). Formation can also be an opportunity to identify and sharpen strengths while honing those of the formator as well. Most importantly, by utilizing positive psychology in formation, we are given the opportunity to prepare religious and clergy for their future based upon what is good and true in their lives. Undoubtedly, this joyful overflow will be poured out upon all they encounter whether in the rectory, the local church, congregation, society, order or the mission field.

## RECOMMENDED READING

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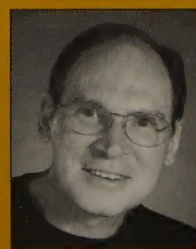
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Monica Applewhite, Ph.D.

# Lessons for Seminary Formation

*Found in the Pages of the John Jay Studies*





For almost ten years, the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, with principal researcher Dr. Karen Terry, studied sexual abuse by Roman Catholic clergy in the United States. This research was commissioned in 2002 by the National Review Board and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Office of Child and Youth Protection in fulfillment of Article 9 of the bishop's *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*. Article 9 reads as follows:

To understand the problem more fully and to enhance the effectiveness of our future response, the National Review Board will also commission a descriptive study, with the full cooperation of our dioceses/eparchies, of the nature and scope of the problem within the Catholic Church in the United States, including such data as statistics on perpetrators and victims.

The research by the John Jay College consisted of two studies. The first study was descriptive, "The Nature and Scope of Clergy Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church from 1950 to 2002." The report's description of abuse contained numbers of victims, perpetrators and incidents, included when and where the abuse occurred and when the abuse was reported to the church. The "Nature and Scope" study was completed in 2004. The second study examined the reasons why the



*The number of incidents occurring per year increased steadily from the mid-1960s, peaked at the end of the 1970s and declined sharply in the early-1980s.*

Catholic Church saw a rise in sexual abuse perpetrated by clergy throughout the 1960s and 1970s, with a sharp decline in incidents beginning in 1985. Thus, the focus of the second study was on the actual abuse, not the factors that led to widespread reporting in 2002. The "Causes and Context" study was published in May 2011. Taken together, the discoveries of these two extensive research projects provide a thorough description of the actions that caused the abuse throughout the decades. The findings are perhaps as noteworthy for the theories that were *not* supported as for those that were.

Although numerous facets of the studies can and should be used to shape future decision-making, the following article focuses on the dimensions of the findings that have direct implications for seminary formation and how we conceptualize ongoing formation of clergy within the United States Catholic Church. Readers in other countries may also find these insights relevant.

#### FINDINGS RELEVANT TO FORMATION

In 2002, when many policy and governance decisions were made, neither leaders nor ordinary people knew with certainty how large or widespread the problem of sexual abuse by clergy was. But with virtually all dioceses and most of the religious communities participating in the John Jay Study, we now have answers we did not have before. So, before delving into the nuances of the conclusions, it is necessary to consider in the broadest terms the findings of the "Nature and Scope" study and "Causes and Context" study that have implications for formation.

#### NATURE AND SCOPE FINDINGS

The study of the prevalence of sexual abuse incidents in the Catholic Church from 1950 to 2002 showed a clear and consistent pattern. The number of incidents occurring per year increased steadily from the mid-1960s, peaked at the end of the 1970s and declined sharply in the early-1980s. The number of incidents has remained low

since about 1994. Substantial delays in reporting, as are common with incidents of sexual abuse, caused accounts of abuse to be provided decades after the actual abuse occurred.

In the 52-year period, 4,392 priests abused minors. That is about 4 percent of all clergy who served in those years. Approximately 96 percent of clergy who served from 1950 to 2002 did not have an allegation of abuse against them. The critical questions are, "What differentiated the 4 percent who abused from all the others who did not?" and "Of those distinctions, what if anything, has been the role of formation?"

Of the approximately four percent of priests who were accused or found to have abused, 56 percent were alleged to have abused only once. Throughout the 52-year period of study, the number of priests who either had one allegation against them, or whose period of abuse was less than one year, stayed fairly stable. In other words, the numbers of offenders who abused on a lesser, or one-time scale stayed about the same, while the numbers of multiple-victim offenders varied dramatically over these years.

With respect to multiple-victim offenders, the numbers of incidents increased in an irregular but steady pattern throughout the 1960s and 1970s, peaking in the early 1980s and then dropping rapidly following 1985. In addition, among the more startling results from the John Jay analysis is that of all the victims of clergy sexual abuse over the 52-year period, about 3 percent of the offenders accounted for 25 percent of the victims. That is, 137 offenders abused approximately 2600 victims. These persistent offenders differed in many ways from the majority of clergy who abused. First, of the 1,915 clergy offenders who abused only one victim, the average age at which he committed his first known offense was 41, eleven years after ordination. Of the 540 clerics who abused four to nine different victims, the average age of the cleric was 35, four years after ordination. Finally, of the 137 clerics who abused more than 10 victims, the cleric's average age of first known offense was 30 years old and he normally began abusing during his first year after ordination.



As we begin to discuss "solutions to the problem" we are immediately confronted with the fact that these patterns suggest a need to address problems with significantly heterogeneous sexual offenders of at least two types: a) the one-time or limited offender who abused for the first time about ten years after ordination, and b) the habitual or multiple offender who abused immediately or shortly after ordination and in some situations began abusing even prior to ordination.

## CAUSES AND CONTEXT FINDINGS

Within the lengthy report of findings in the "Causes and Context" study are numerous useful pieces of information for professionals working to prevent and respond to sexual abuse, both within and outside the Catholic Church. Following are several key findings with direct implications for formation.

*Historical and Cultural Context:* The "Causes and Context" report began with a description of the historical and cultural context in which the sexual abuse crisis occurred. The context is interesting because the rise in cases of Catholic clergy sexual abuse in the 1960s and 1970s coincided with the rise in other types of deviant behavior in society such as drug use and crime. During this time, there was a loosening of social constraints, which led to a statistical increase in both premarital sexual behavior and divorce. For example, from 1972 to 1985, the percentage of Americans who thought that pre-marital sex was "not wrong at all" went from 26 percent to 42 percent. In contrast, this era also saw a shift in the criminal justice system's treatment of child sexual abuse. Statutory rape and child sexual abuse laws were evolving and becoming more widespread and standardized. By 1990, all states had mandatory reporting laws for child sexual abuse.

One of the more thought-provoking considerations that is contained in the section on historical and cultural contexts is that the characteristics of the Catholic priesthood that have remained consistent throughout the decades,

such as having an all-male clergy and having a commitment to celibate chastity, cannot explain the increase, peak and decrease in abuse incidents. The researchers conclude that any factor that remained constant throughout the timeframe under study cannot be considered a cause for the crisis.

*Historical Patterns in the Catholic Church:* The researchers conducted further analysis to determine whether the year of ordination had an effect on whether a priest would later abuse. These calculations confirmed that the year of ordination did have a significant influence on likelihood to abuse. Forty-four percent of those later accused were ordained before 1960. One third of all priest offenders were ordained during the 1940s and 1950s. Almost half (48 percent) of those who later abused were ordained from 1960 to 1979. This question of cohort, or years in the seminary, also has implications for the questions surrounding the effects of priests' self-described gender preference and their likelihood to sexually abuse minors, described in the next section.

*Trends in Sexuality:* The John Jay researchers looked specifically at how seminarians self-identified their sexual preferences. Prior to the mid-1970s, about three percent of seminarians identified themselves as homosexual, while in the 1980s and 1990s, about 40 percent of seminarians identified themselves as homosexual. This led the researchers to conclude that a homosexual identity, and even the existence of a homosexual subculture that was reported to have existed in some seminaries in the 1980s and 1990s, could not account for clergy sexual abuse because the cohorts that produced the most offenders were not the cohorts self-identifying as homosexual and were not the cohorts attending seminary in the 1980s and 1990s.

Those who identified themselves as heterosexual or homosexual were less likely to abuse a minor than those who identified themselves as "confused." The condition of being "confused" was most commonly found among those who were ordained prior to the 1960s.

*Seminary Education:* Regarding seminary education, the John Jay

*Those who identified themselves as heterosexual or homosexual were less likely to abuse a minor than those who identified themselves as "confused."*



researchers found that priests who abused were not significantly more likely to have attended a minor seminary and were not more likely to have attended a foreign seminary. They were, however, significantly less likely to have participated in human formation while in the seminary. Men ordained before 1960 represent 44 percent of those who abused. Men ordained after 1975 had a lower level of subsequent abuse than those ordained before 1975.

Development of human formation programs and increased attention to the challenges of celibate chastity began in the 1970s and increased substantially throughout the 1980s. Human formation in the study was defined as focusing on self-knowledge, interpersonal relationships, emotional maturity, human sexuality and psychosexual development and integration, as well as focusing on meeting the challenges of celibacy and chastity in the priesthood.

*Ongoing Support* An additional important point that is made in this section is that job performance and other kinds of evaluations are usually reserved for the first five years after ordination. In most dioceses, pastors are not obliged to undergo regular assessment. Based on the research, we now know that many priests began abusing years after they were ordained. The abuse often began during times of increased job stress, social isolation and decreased contact with peers. These men may have found that there were few structures in place to help them. The study also showed that many diocesan priests let go of the practice of spiritual direction after only a few years of ordained ministry and that this is associated with a higher risk of all forms of misconduct in ministry. The lack of ongoing professional supervision, accountability and support are all critical considerations for ministers and other high-access positions of trust.

*Psychological Explanations:* A psychological explanation would be that the priests who went on to sexually abuse minors differed psychologically from other priests who did not abuse minors. In order to consider this explanation, researchers examined clinical data from three treatment centers. Priests who sexually abused

minors were compared to priests who were sexually involved with adults, priests who sought treatment for mental health problems, and with seminarians who had no known problems.

The priests who sought treatment for mental health problems had the most significant measurements for depression, anxiety and addiction potential. Priests who sexually abused scored the highest on the Dominance Scale, which measures initiative, confidence and resourcefulness in social relationships, none of which would be troubling if identified in the absence of behavioral misconduct.


Other strong, but not statistically significant personality markers for priests who sexually abused minors were denial of social anxiety, authority problems, persecutory ideas, amorality and over-controlled hostility. Although each of these personality markers is considered negative, they also are found in a sizeable portion of the normal adult population, including priests who did not sexually abuse. Overall, the findings indicated that priests who sexually abused cannot yet be reliably differentiated from non-abusive priests, based on psychological testing.

*Behavioral Explanations and Life Experiences:* The John Jay researchers also considered theories that certain childhood and adult life experiences could cause or predispose the priests to abuse minors. Among the primary childhood experiences that were examined were being physically or sexually abused, having major family stressors, substance abuse in the family and mental illness in the family. The adult experiences that were considered were engaging in sexual activities with adults, use of pornography and how the priests viewed their own sexual orientation (heterosexual, homosexual, bi-sexual or confused).

Having been sexually abused as a child was the only life experience that was associated with later sexually abusing a child. The study also found that while having a family that treated sex as a taboo topic was positively associated with post-ordination sexual behavior with adults, this factor did not predict a greater likelihood to sexually abuse a child.







With respect to adult sexual experiences, a high percentage of all priests who entered treatment programs did have sexual experiences with adults. Although having sexual experiences with male or female adults prior to and during seminary formation was a predictor of future sexual activity with adults after ordination, these behaviors were not predictive of sexual victimization of a minor. Use of pornography did not, on its own, predict sexual abuse of a minor. However, use of multiple forms of pornography, such as video, print and cyber-pornography, was associated with sexual abuse of minors.

*Personal Life Narratives:* One last interesting finding from this section resulted from an examination of priest-offenders' personal life narratives. Their narratives were expected to differ significantly from other priests' stories and self-concepts. However, this hypothesis was not supported. In fact, the priest abusers saw themselves very much like other priests saw themselves, including being able to successfully fulfill their role as priest, despite the fact that they were living the life of an abuser.

In conclusion, the findings indicated that while the group of priests who sexually abused minors had some characteristics and experiences that differentiated them from other priests, they were not readily distinguishable from priests who were treated for other reasons nor would they be easily identified in the absence of abuse allegations.

## LESSONS LEARNED

① *Allowing even one persistent offender to complete studies and become ordained can lead to vast and incalculable injury and destruction.* The data suggest that currently these offenders are being effectively screened out prior to reaching the seminary or during the process of formation. However, as challenges continue to pressure the system, it becomes critical to actively ensure that there are no seminarians who complete the process while hiding their true selves from formators. Persistent offenders may have a variety of personality disorders, including

narcissism and psychopathology, that are associated with superficial charm, being charismatic and having a talent for manipulation. This means that a seminarian who does not engage in genuine self-reflection, rigorous honesty and behavioral accountability cannot be permitted to continue seminary studies. While formators have for many years expressed concerns about seminarians who were more guarded and less forthcoming, the findings of the John Jay Study regarding persistent offenders now require that those who guide formation regard these qualities as potentially dangerous.

② *By the time a man is ordained to the Roman Catholic priesthood, it is essential that he know and understand his own sexuality and is capable of integrating his own attractions and sexuality into his ministry, rather than attempting to deny their existence.* Denying one's attractions, ignoring sexual urges and failing to address intimacy needs in appropriate ways are not viable options. The John Jay findings indicate that neither a heterosexual nor homosexual orientation is associated with higher risk to sexually abuse a child, but being confused about one's sexual orientation certainly is. This means that self-awareness regarding sexual orientation and the ability to accept and integrate one's sexuality is needed to produce fully formed priests who recognize and accept their own challenges and vulnerabilities.

This also means that vocation directors and formators should be highly conversant with human sexuality, prepared to discuss topics of sexuality and capable of doing so in concrete, non-judgmental terms that invite further self-disclosure. Knowledge regarding normal human sexuality also allows vocation directors to make recommendations for advancement in the admissions process for seminary and to bring collateral information to psychologists who evaluate a candidate's appropriateness for serving in a life-long position of trust.





③ *Honest work regarding celibate chastity is critical to long-term prevention.* Considering that the use of multiple forms of pornography was associated with a greater likelihood to abuse, it is likely that issues of sexual addiction, or at least high libido, were components in the larger picture for some clerical offenders. Sexual addiction, compulsive sexual behavior and use of sexual activities as coping strategies typically emerge early in life. If a seminarian has factors such as these in his earlier life it is necessary to treat them as serious impediments to a life of celibate chastity and as potential risk factors for abuse. At times, this is more difficult than it sounds, particularly, when a candidate fails to disclose such information or presents himself as fundamentally changed. This last scenario may invoke the power of conversion and cause leaders to regard the previous patterns of sexual behavior as irrelevant.

④ *Development of intimacy skills is necessary to the formation of emotionally mature men who are capable of meeting their own needs.* Adults have needs for closeness, self-disclosure, self-acceptance, shared experiences, affection and other intimacy and inter-personal needs. The number and variety of interpersonal relationships needed to meet these needs may vary among individuals, but with few exceptions, all adults have intimacy needs. Meeting these

needs takes some confidence and social skill, as well as time and opportunities for sharing conversations and activities. The absence of intimacy in Western culture is generally experienced as loneliness, and loneliness is a common precondition when priests who have already been in ministry for a number of years suddenly begin to initiate inappropriate or sexually abusive relationships with children or young people. Considering that 56 percent of all priests who abused were first known to have abused more than ten years after ordination, it is necessary to take a careful look at their ability to develop and maintain long-term, close and fulfilling intimate relationships with peers.

⑤ *Across the board, Roman Catholic priests need spiritual direction, professional supervision and other forms of personal support.* We have established that it is extremely difficult to predict which men in formation will or will not turn out to sexually offend against children and young people. There is a need for defined, ongoing formation and professional supervision of all priests that is similar to the supervision that is required of other human service professionals. Preventing sexual abuse is one grave reason for needing accountability, but there are numerous dimensions of priestly life and work that would be aided and enhanced through standardized, ongoing guidance and mentoring.

## CONCLUSION

Overall, the John Jay studies demonstrate that human formation must continue, and must delve deeper. Changes that were made in human formation programs in seminaries corresponded with the dramatic decrease of sexual abuse incidents in 1985. Although it is difficult at times in the face of so much suffering to recognize the positive changes that helped bring about the decrease in incidents, there is no ignoring that seminaries began addressing some variables that can lead to clergy sexual abuse. Clearly there were other variables influencing the outcomes as well, but it would be a mistake to devalue the changes that were made or to disregard the role of human formation in the overall decline of clergy sexual abuse. Human formation programs that focus on self-awareness, self-disclosure, interpersonal relationships, human sexuality and emotional maturity are necessary to priestly formation. Self-awareness and honesty regarding intimacy needs, sexual feelings, attractions, infatuations and love are needed in order to integrate these human dimensions into a life of priestly ministry.



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# UNDERSTANDING NARCISSISTIC PROBLEMS: *A Guide to the Basics*

Vincent J. Lynch, Ph.D.

For more than ten years now I have treated in individual outpatient psychotherapy a large number of priests, religious brothers and seminarians, many of whom have been referred by formators and/or superiors as a result of problems that can be termed as narcissistic in nature. Those with such problems are persons who, because of their excessive self-absorption and/or emotional sensitivities, adversely affect life in community, have difficulties in their relationships with superiors and/or peers, have interpersonal problems in their work with parishioners and/or experience storminess in other areas of critical relationships. Narcissistic problems are rather complex to understand. This article will provide an introductory understanding of this type of behavior. While formators and superiors are not expected to serve as psychotherapists to those with these problems, a basic

understanding of this behavior may shed some light on this issue that frequently presents among priests, religious and those in formation.

We are familiar with the Roman poet Ovid's story of Narcissus, the handsome young man who fell in love with the image of himself he saw reflected in a stream. Though extremely thirsty Narcissus could not bring himself to drink of the water in the stream for fear of disturbing that reflected beautiful image of self that he admired and grew to love excessively. He died of thirst, staring at the reflected image, not being able to disturb it, for if he did so it might forever be destroyed. Persons who possess these characteristics of excessive self-absorption are, like Narcissus, seriously vulnerable to certain specific kinds of emotional hurt and injury.



## CHARACTERISTICS OF NARCISSISM

Some characteristics and vulnerabilities of those with narcissistic problems include:

- Grandiose beliefs about one's intellectual abilities and accomplishments.
- An interpersonal style that conveys a sense of haughtiness.
- Being easily hurt, and devastated emotionally by criticism, failure and the verbal slights by others.
- An excessive desire to be admired by others for physical attractiveness, sexual prowess, etc.
- Deep anger/rage in response to situations that are perceived as humiliating or denigrating.
- Intense ambitions for success, prominence, recognition; not wishing to "share the spotlight" with others.
- A desire for special status, a sense of entitlement for special considerations and privileges, a sense that the "usual rules don't apply to me."

Priests, religious and those in formation have special challenges when it comes to these narcissistic issues. I think this has not been given sufficient attention in writings that address formation. For example, the call to priesthood or the religious life can engender feelings of personal specialness, entitlement and grandiosity. Some contend that the so-called "culture of clericalism" is connected to this very issue. Also, as men and women try to live out the authenticity of their vocation to the priesthood or religious life, they are called to develop an ever-deepening spiritual life that includes examining the issue of personal sin/woundedness in their own lives and the need to let go of the belief that "I am in control of my life and the center of my world." Further, religious are often expected to be a contributing member to their community, at which they sometimes succeed

(in public view) and sometimes fail (also in public view).

Most priests, religious and those in formation work with spiritual directors on deepening their prayer life and call to personal holiness, a very challenging undertaking. Both the consolations and the desolations experienced in a deepening prayer life can evoke for some a range of unrealistic beliefs about one's self. Finally, engaging in various liturgical, apostolic or evangelizing activities can be very narcissistically challenging for some since these require being seen and performing in very public, visible settings.

On the human formation side, these men and women are often confronting complex issues about their sexuality as they attempt to embrace a life of chastity. This quest for living an authentically chaste life is often filled with a mix of success and failure. Many times those experiences that are deemed as failures in this area engender deep feelings of shame, humiliation and self-loathing.

These varied and unique issues can leave one feeling especially narcissistically vulnerable. The person may often feel hurt and criticized when faults are exposed via fraternal correction, and often feels less-than (or sometimes better-than) others in various situations that can be experienced as highly competitive. Perhaps more so than other vocations, priesthood and religious life are filled with a multiplicity of experiences that relate to success/failure, worthiness/unworthiness, pride/humility, being good/being bad, sin/virtue and acceptance/rejection. These are the very emotional states that can fuel narcissistic distress. Those who have pre-existing narcissistic vulnerabilities as a result of certain early life experiences (which will be discussed later in the article) are especially at-risk for experiencing increased narcissistic problems over time.

When these problems become deeply ingrained and endure over time, the person might meet criteria for a psychiatric diagnosis of narcissistic personality disorder. Many persons with this disorder are especially resistant to psychotherapy since they

often don't see any problem with how they engage their world. They believe that others have a problem because these others can't recognize the special talents, skills, abilities, etc., possessed by the narcissistic person. People with this disorder often have isolated lives and have few, if any, satisfying relationships. Frequently they are disdainful, haughty and dismissive of others.

When narcissistic problems are more moderate in nature, however, the person is termed as possessing narcissistic features in contrast to the more treatment-resistant diagnosis of narcissistic personality disorder. Most of the clergy, religious and those in formation I have worked with have these kinds of narcissistic features. Many have often been receptive to psychotherapeutic interventions over time and have a good prognosis for emotional recovery after a course of psychotherapy. This article will confine its discussion to those with narcissistic features.

It should be noted that research has found that this type of psychopathology exists largely among men, though some women do present with these problems. The two cases that will be discussed later are those of men with narcissistic features, since that has been the population most familiar in my practice. However, the principles and strategies for understanding and helping those with narcissistic problems are equally applicable to women.

This article will present a basic overview of how to understand and intervene with those who present narcissistic problems. My assumption is that most readers of this article are not mental health professionals but rather clergy and religious serving as superiors or formators. We will address what some of the factors are in early life that might pre-dispose individuals to develop narcissistic vulnerabilities later in life and how to be helpful to those who may be experiencing such problems. Finally, two cases will be presented that illustrate the issues addressed in the article.



## THE ROLE OF EMPATHY IN HEALTHY VS. PATHOLOGICAL NARCISSISM

Many psychoanalytic researchers, thinkers and practitioners believe that central to understanding the etiology of narcissistic disturbances is the concept of empathy. Heinz Kohut (1971, 1977) wrote extensively about how the presence or absence of accurately empathic relationships with parents and other caretakers in early life can determine how healthily or pathologically one develops in later life regarding narcissistic wishes and desires. He sees healthy, accurate empathy as that very human characteristic of being able to “correctly experience the inner life of the other” and to respond to the other in ways that are in the person’s best interests based on that empathic understanding.

Kohut coined the term “nuclear self” to refer to the core of one’s personality structure. In early life the nuclear self of the child is characterized by exceedingly grandiose demands, desires, wishes and ambitions. When parents and other caregivers respond to the child through interventions that provide “optimal frustration” of this grandiosity (i.e. not too little, not too much) the child can over time move away from this grandiosity and slowly develop a more cohesive nuclear self structure that allows the person to experience himself or herself not as a demanding individual who wants to be the grandiose center of the universe but rather as a person who experiences healthy and wholesome ambitions and strivings in relation to others in his or her life. Such persons can engage realistically their talents, ambitions, abilities and limitations in flexible and successful ways. They can also better master disappointments, tolerate hurt and criticism and manage life’s frequent slings and arrows.

When a child does not have the benefit of parents, caretakers and others who can supply accurate empathic relatedness on a fairly consistent basis, the seeds of narcissistic psychopathology can be sown. Rather than “optimally frustrating” the child’s grandiose self by employing the caretaker’s capacity for

healthy, accurate, empathic relatedness, the child’s grandiosity is responded to by empathic failure. Such empathic failure can come in various forms, characterized by a lack of understanding of what the child truly needs and wishes. These inaccuracies may include interactions driven by overly gratifying the child’s grandiosity (overstimulation of the grandiose self structure) or perhaps humiliating or shaming the child for his/her naturally occurring grandiose wishes and desires (under-stimulation of the self structure). Though helping the child move from a grandiose self to a cohesive self is a tall order, Kohut writes that healthy, accurate, empathic relatedness by caretakers can achieve this end. He is clear that accurate empathic relatedness is not to be thought of as perfect, nor can it occur all the time. Instead, if parents or caretakers show healthy, accurate, empathic relatedness at least most of the time the child has a good chance of making the transition from a grandiose self structure to a more cohesive self structure.

Those who grow up in family environments characterized by a predominance of unempathic relatedness by his/her parents and caretakers (i.e. either too little or too much gratification of grandiose wishes) can be extremely sensitive to criticism, become emotionally hurt very easily and are often rageful if their excessive narcissistic strivings are not gratified. These demands carry over to relationships in the wider world and often continue into later life if corrective experiences do not occur along the way.

Kohut emphasizes that beneath the rage of the narcissistically vulnerable person’s hurt, humiliation or shame is a deep wish, yearning or longing to be understood, soothed and to participate in the calmness of a caretaker who emotionally understands that vulnerable person and can make meaning of the narcissistically distressed person’s turmoil. Further, the person yearns for that caretaker to explain his/her emotional turmoil and how he or she can heal from it.

Thus, the process by which the caretaker uses accurate empathic relatedness is first: to try and accurately understand the other person’s turmoil,

*Kohut sees healthy, accurate empathy as that very human characteristic of being able to “correctly experience the inner life of the other” and to respond to the other in ways that are in the person’s best interests based on that empathic understanding.*





and second: to try and sensitively explain the narcissistically-driven turmoil of the distressed person. When successful, this process results in the person feeling valued, understood, calmer and emotionally more cohesive.

Just as parents and caretakers use their accurate empathic abilities to help their children leave behind grandiose, unrealistic wishes and demands, so too, the therapist can use his/her human capacity for accurate empathy in understanding and explaining the inner turmoil of their clients who are vulnerable to narcissistic disturbances. Over time, such empathic immersion with the therapist enables the client to slowly give up the residue of the grandiose self and replace it with a healthier, more cohesive self structure.

#### CASE EXAMPLES\*

*Example 1:* Brother Mark was a forty-two-year-old principal of a medium size Catholic high school. He served for five years in that capacity before he was removed by the school's Board of Trustees after refusing to modify some of his ways of interacting with alumni and potential benefactors. He hosted lavish receptions and golf outings for

these groups on many occasions during a three-year period, despite the warnings of board members not to do so. When he was eventually removed from his position as a result of this inappropriate spending he became enraged and made several unsuccessful attempts to get various groups to advocate for his reinstatement. He warned board members that the school could not thrive without his outstanding leadership. He felt great humiliation and outrage in relation to the board at his dismissal. He also became enraged with his religious order's superiors at the province level for not sufficiently backing his desire to become reinstated. He remained resentful and bitter for several months, relentlessly trying to rectify this injustice. He was a very uncooperative member of the house in which he resided. Eventually his community's superior insisted he seek therapy for this ongoing distress.

Early on the therapy focused on efforts to try and understand what was behind Brother Mark's behavior. For many weeks he was unable to get beyond his rage and resentments; however, over time he slowly was able to talk about his early life and made some connections between his present and his past.

He described his early home life as "bleak, dead and empty." His father was alcoholic, often unemployed and his mother was chronically depressed. Neither seemed engaged with him in any significant ways during his early years. He made repeated unsuccessful efforts to engage his parents by getting good grades and being a dutiful son in many ways, hoping this would catch their attention and make them feel proud of him. This never happened. He saw religious life as a possible way out from this bleak existence since as a high school student he greatly admired the lives of his school's religious brothers and priests.

He enjoyed some initial successes in his role when he was appointed high school principal and he very much wanted to create for himself the life that he always longed for, yet never experienced, in his family of origin. His lavish entertaining was a way in which he acted out these longstanding desires to have an abundant, stimulating life. During two years of therapy Brother Mark was able to work through many longstanding complex hurts, resentments, humiliations and unfulfilled yearnings for affirmation that dated back to his childhood. As this work progressed, he began to



slowly develop a satisfying life individually and in community. He came to rediscover that he still had real talents and interests in teaching biology, which was his assignment in the early years of religious life. Three years ago he returned to the classroom in a high school in another state, also conducted by his religious order, where he remains to this day. He is a productive member of his religious order.

*Example 2:* Anthony was a twenty-seven-year-old man studying for the priesthood. He grew up in a state other than the one in which he was studying and had a noticeable accent from his home region. One evening over supper shortly after his arrival two other men in formation with him made a lighthearted, humorous comment to Anthony about his accent. This sparked an intensely angry response from Anthony. He felt these men were making fun of him, thinking they believed they were better than him. This furious response was seen as an overreaction and shocked the other two men. They kept their distance from him for a considerable period after that incident. This incident was brought to the attention of Anthony's academic advisor by the two men.

A few weeks later another incident occurred that sparked a similar angry response from Anthony when a priest faculty member, Fr. Tom, made what was intended to be a joking comment about missed foul shots during a student-faculty pickup basketball game. Anthony felt these comments were especially intended for him even though he was just one of three players who missed these shots. After the game Fr. Tom made efforts to discuss the incident with Anthony but he became angrier and resisted Fr. Tom's efforts to discuss things with him. Fr. Tom became concerned and discussed the incident with Anthony's advisor.

After this second incident Anthony's advisor referred him to see me and we began therapy by trying to understand more about these two incidents. He discussed at some length how he felt unwelcome and distant from his peers and from faculty members. He felt that many unreasonable demands had

been made of him to carry out chores and other obligations in the community in which he was studying and residing. He was contemplating leaving formation as a result when we began our work.

An exploration of his early life revealed that Anthony grew up in a family that viewed him as a golden boy. This was especially true in his relationship with his mother. He was the youngest of four children and had a special bond with his mother who doted over him in many ways his entire life. His father was a businessman who traveled a lot. Anthony described that he could do no wrong in the eyes of his mother and he disregarded limits that were set for the three older children (curfew, chores, etc.). Anthony's mother would look the other way when it came to setting limits and boundaries for Anthony. She often thought it was cute and funny how Anthony came up with very creative excuses for getting out of various situations.

In his therapy Anthony came to understand that his very deeply-rooted sense of specialness and entitlement had been experienced by others in his present day life as quite off-putting and as a result he never really developed any close friendships as a boy or as a young man. He came to see that although his golden boy status at home was gratifying in some ways, he paid dearly for that status. We worked extensively on this issue. During sixteen months of therapy Anthony was able to slowly feel more comfortable with being one among many and slowly gave up his need for special status and recognition. He remains in his program of formation, making considerable progress in all areas and enjoys newly developing successful relationships with his peers and with faculty members.

## CONCLUSION

Those with narcissistic issues frequently present with an air of grandiosity, entitlement, rage and specialness. Beneath this façade, however, is often the self structure of a very wounded child who has not had the benefit of healthy, accurate, empathically-attuned parents and caretakers during the early years. Their present day vulnerabilities

can come to the attention of superiors and/or formators in a variety of ways. The superior or formator who tries to empathically understand what is beneath the surface of the narcissistically-distressed person can provide a valuable corrective experience whereby the person feels understood, perhaps for the very first time in his or her life. Sometimes that is all that is necessary in terms of corrective action. What is essential is to try and empathically respond to (and not react to) the surface symptoms of narcissistic distress.

In some cases, however, the narcissistically-distressed individual is more complex and can benefit from a course of therapy that allows him or her to explore in greater depth the relevant unfinished emotional business from the past that lies at the core of his or her distress.

In this article I have tried to offer an overview of basic issues pertaining to narcissism and narcissistic disturbances and to enable the superior or formator to have new tools in understanding this area of human behavior.

*\*Both cases represent a composite of features drawn from several clients with whom I have worked over the years.*

## RECOMMENDED READING

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# Entitled Pastoral Ministers of Shaping the Church of the Future





# Servant-Leaders?

Mary Elizabeth Kenel, Ph.D.



Recently the popular media have focused attention on a prominent characteristic of our times, namely the exaggerated sense of entitlement that has infiltrated all socioeconomic levels. Authors Rhiana Maidenberry, a freelance writer on child rearing and parenting issues and Lori Gottlieb (*How to Land Your Kid in Therapy*) speak of the parenting trends that moved society from *Generation X* to *Generation Me*, otherwise known as *Generation Gimme* or *The Entitlement Generation*. The seemingly laudable determination to raise children with all possible opportunities and advantages coupled with a focus on building self-esteem that instilled into the children how smart, talented, beautiful, unique and special they were has reaped less than stellar results.

## INFLUENCE OF CHILD-REARING PRACTICES

In many instances, permissive parents gave excessive, unearned praise to the child, thus fostering an unrealistic self-image that could not withstand contact with the realities of the wider world. Over-indulgence and spoiling of the child coupled with inadequate parental discipline resulted in selfishness, a disregard for limits and a failure to consider the needs or rights of others. Idealization of the child imposed parental projections of excellence and achievement in particular areas that the child, often subconsciously, felt obliged to meet—and resented having to do so. At the same time this idealization

created a self-image of perfection and the expectation that one's uniqueness or specialness would continue to be recognized into adulthood. One problem related to this style of parenting is the increased dependency of children on parents to smooth their way—be it on the playground or in the classroom. Teachers now field calls from parents who wish to discuss their child's grades and, often enough, attempt to persuade the instructor to raise the grade a notch without giving consideration to the amount of work performed or what level of actual learning occurred.

Nor does this problem exist only at the level of elementary or high school students. Professor Elayne Cliff, writing in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (3/27/11), noted what she termed a misplaced sense of entitlement and passive-aggressive (sometimes simply aggressive) behavior on the part of some of the students in a graduate class she taught. These students demonstrated a lack of intellectual rigor and resorted to rude, disruptive behavior when their deficits were called to their attention. As she attempted to hold these students to basic standards in terms of critical thinking and writing skills, many engaged in conduct that included blame, acted-out rage and disrespect for Professor Cliff and their classmates. While Professor Cliff was able to make her case when summoned to defend herself before the school's administration, she noted the students never offered an apology to her or to the class nor did they suffer any negative consequences for their disruptive behavior.



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Entitlement issues, a feature of narcissistic personalities and other mental disorders in which grandiosity and exaggerated self-importance play a role, are increasingly a concern for those of us working in the mental health community and as spiritual directors. (See two excellent articles, one by Len Sperry, M.D., Ph.D., and Jonathan Sperry, Ph.D., and the other by the late Paul D. Marceau that appeared in *HUMAN DEVELOPMENT* [Winter 2011] addressing issues of narcissism.) So many of our clients seem to feel entitled to the good life and to have everything go smoothly for them at all times that they have little sense of perspective—anything that is difficult or trying seems to be perceived as a narcissistic insult directed at them personally and tends to assume the proportions of a calamity. As a society, we are given to complaint and have become experts at affixing blame somewhere outside us. The language of performance of duty, personal responsibility and delayed gratification is seldom heard, let alone learned and incorporated into one's basic personality makeup.

#### ENTITLEMENT IN SEMINARIES AND PASTORAL TRAINING PROGRAMS

Regrettably, although not surprisingly, the all-pervading sense of entitlement has infiltrated our seminaries, houses of religious formation and theological and ministerial training programs. This is true not only in terms of Catholic institutions but also presents a problem in many of the mainstream Christian churches, particularly those more hierarchically structured. See, for example, an article entitled *The Commission Model: An Alternative to the Professional Model in the Presbyterian Church* by the Rev. Gary Kush, Ph.D., October 13, 2011, [www.webucators.org](http://www.webucators.org).

Far too often the student raised in a culture of entitlement arrives on the doorstep of the seminary or other ministerial formation program with the conviction of his or her unique special-

ness well entrenched. Certain aspects of formation programs and traditional deferential practice by the laity may foster the sense of having a special vocational call from God, of being singled out by the Almighty as somehow a cut above others, failing to recognize that the concept of call, while recognizing one might be set apart, has never included the notion that one is set above. Nonetheless, convinced that they are making greater sacrifices than others, many seminary students feel they are entitled not only to a higher place in heaven but also to special treatment here on earth. The lesson Jesus taught through his admonishment to James and John when they were seeking high places in his kingdom appears to have fallen on deaf ears. Rather than focusing on the fact that Jesus offered his disciples only the cup of his suffering (Matthew 20:22-23) and informed them that those who wish to be great must become servants to all (Mark 10:43-44), there are some who seem focused on pomp and circumstance, for example, the ornate robes, red hats, liturgical jewelry and regal titles that mark one as holding a prestigious position of leadership in the church.

This sense of entitlement may manifest in a variety of ways in the seminary, novitiate or pastoral ministry training program. It might be seen during class when certain students monopolize time and attention, often enough challenging the instructor or other students in a way that smacks of entrapment rather than a genuine desire to learn. Disagreements with their preferred line of reasoning or particular interpretation of scripture might be met with disparaging remarks or a not so subtle claim of heresy. A student's exaggerated sense of entitlement might also show itself in terms of expecting (and often receiving) privileges not granted to seemingly less academically gifted students. Rectors and novice masters are not immune to gratification of narcissistic ego-needs and our society is adept at teaching the use of flattery in



order to secure the special treatment some consider a birthright. Entitlement is definitely demonstrated in the thinking of the students who feel they are owed a certain level of attention and admiration regardless of their behavior—a perpetuation of the attitude fostered by permissive parenting that failed to make appropriate behavioral demands or set realistic limits.

The sex abuse scandals and the covering up of such behavior by bishops and other church officials have exposed highly narcissistic elements in the clerical self-image that pre-date the current climate of entitlement but interact with the current trend in a highly toxic manner. By virtue of his ordination, the priest is perceived to be endowed with extraordinary spiritual power that leads to the conviction, on his part and on the part of some of the laity, that he has a special grasp on the truth in matters of faith. Given this sort of understanding of one's exalted status, it is relatively easy to become ego-centric and self-absorbed, while exercising dominion over lay persons who are perceived to hold a subordinate, even subservient, role. As Richard Rohr, O.F.M., noted in *Contemplation in Action*, for the ego everything is a commodity. It lives inside of self-manufactured boundaries instead of inside the boundaries of the God-self. It lives out of its own superior image instead of mirroring the image of God. The ego is constantly searching for any solid and superior identity. A spiritual self-image gives us status, stability and security.

Seminarians and others in various pastoral ministry formation programs are shaped by the clerical culture that provides them with identity and purpose in life. When that culture or worldview is replete with narcissism promoted under the guise of spirituality, the identity formed comes to be one of identification with the power, prestige and social status of the church as institution rather than with the church as the Body of Christ, the People of God, called to exercise a preferential option

for the poor. As Richard Rohr, O.F.M., noted, there is no more clever way for the false self to hide than behind the mask of spirituality. In the name of seeking God, the ego pads and protects itself from self-discovery, which is an almost perfect cover for its inherent narcissism.

If the exaggerated sense of one's vocational worthiness is not curbed in the course of a formation program, the entitled and privileged student eventually becomes an entitled and privileged priest, religious or lay minister and carries the sense of entitlement into his or her pastoral ministry. Despite efforts on the part of formators and seminary personnel, the person who has not faced the shadow side of his or her sense of entitlement and exaggerated notion of specialness seems not to grasp that being a minister of any sort is a call to service of others rather than a call to glorify the self. Expectations of being ministered to, for example by claiming preferential service in a variety of situations, subtly requesting favors or free labor from church members, and considering it only right to have the best food or wine available, signal the presence of an exaggerated sense of entitlement on the part of one whose true calling it is to do the ministering to others.

Holy Thursday is sometimes referred to as the feast day dedicated to priests. Although some might associate this designation with the institution of the Eucharist, John's Gospel (13:1-15) presents instead the portrait of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples and instructing them with the words: "So if I, your Lord and Teacher have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example that you should do as I have done to you."

Still other manifestations of the sense of entitlement are displayed in the pastoral minister's expectation that all his or her ideas, whether they have to do with liturgy or fund raising, education programs or outreach to the poor, are entitled to be followed as outlined

because he or she is most highly qualified and the ideas presented are the most suitable. Resenting the need to consult the laity via the parish council or ignoring the gifts brought to the table by parishioners, feeling that lay people's contributions are inferior due to a lack of some specific training or attendance at a particular school, are also hallmarks of the pastoral minister whose sense of entitlement is leading to the aggrandizement of the self rather than the service of God.

This particular aspect of entitlement, sometimes referred to as pedestal leadership, is likely to be more openly challenged today than was the case in the past. Gone are the days of "Father (or the bishop) knows best." Instead, well-educated parishioners who take theological and scriptural studies seriously are quite likely to offer alternatives to the official pastoral minister's views on a variety of topics. Parishioners bring expertise in areas that include, but are not limited to, liturgy, music, psychology, education, health care, social service and finance, and they demand greater transparency on the part of the pastoral minister in conducting the financial aspects of parish operations. Parishioners also seek greater input into the choice and training of additional lay ministers and the development and operation of parish programs to serve in fostering the liturgical, social and interpersonal aspects of parish life that contribute to the formation of Christian community.

## TRAINING EFFORTS TO COUNTERACT ENTITLEMENT

In an effort to counterbalance the pressure exerted by the culture of narcissism and entitlement, directors of ministerial training programs strive to promote the cultivation of virtue in the lives of their students. In one seminary, for example, the rector's conferences throughout the past year focused on the virtues of joy, sobriety, zeal, diligence, prudence, continence and compassion.



During this time the seminarians were instructed in a time-honored method of quiet, prayerful contemplation that provided them with an opportunity to realize their identity as future priests and discover their shadow sides, and to contemplate the ways in which these shadow sides block their identity in Christ. Over time, through prayer and reflection with a spiritual director, it is hoped the seminarians will truly be able to say with St. Paul "it is no longer I who lives, but Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). In addition to fostering a life of prayer, ministry sites were identified in the area that provide opportunities for outreach to the poor, catechetical work in local parishes and hospital ministry that coincided with the students' enrollment in a Basic Supervised Ministry course where they were mentored by experienced chaplains.

Through the use of an approach of this sort that strives to integrate academics, prayer and service, seminary and formation personnel hope to provide the church with ministers who are not only knowledgeable but also wise, experienced and practical, not simply overtly pious but maturely spiritual, whose sense of worthiness comes not solely from the classroom but arises from their dedicated service to the community where they live. The aim of such formation is to educate ministers who will position themselves not at the apex of a power pyramid but as members of a larger circle of shared power and authority in the community that they serve. Their interest, it is hoped, will not be so focused on attachment to and defense of the institutional church that they forget they are called to build the kingdom and establish the reign of God.

While the efforts noted above are laudable, there does appear to be room for improvement. The book, *Seminaries, Theologates, and the Future of Church Ministry: An Analysis of Trends and Transitions*, addressed, among other topics, curriculum changes in seminary and theologate programs that would be needed to transition the church to meet

the demands of the twenty-first century. Three major areas indicated were increased emphasis on multicultural studies, ecumenism and collaboration. Authors contributing to the book noted, for example, the need to become familiar with Hispanic/Latino cultures, Native American cultures, African-American cultures and Asian cultures. They recommended that each seminary recognize the areas from which their students were coming and to which they would be returning in order to tailor the curriculum to the needs of the minority groups most highly represented in these areas. The need for training to prepare the future priests and pastoral ministers to work effectively in collaborative situations characteristic of ministry in today's church settings was highlighted. Sadly, the authors noted severe resistance on the part of some students who perceived such collaboration as diminishing their authority and control when they came to serve as pastors. Still others objected to the notion of ecumenical studies, fearing it posed too severe a challenge to their own faith. Clearly, as we are now twelve years into the new century, there remains much work to be done.

#### SERVANT LEADERSHIP MODEL

Another model of training for pastoral ministry that is worth considering makes use of the concept of the Servant-Leader. Although Robert K. Greenleaf coined the term servant leadership in 1970, servant leadership is not a modern concept. It offers age-old wisdom from religious leaders such as Lao Tzu, Confucius, Moses and Jesus to leaders in churches and businesses throughout the world—wisdom needed by all who are concerned with organizational life at any level. While Greenleaf never precisely defined his concept of servant leadership, his writings suggest it might be considered a management philosophy that takes an integrated view of the people, the work required and the community spirit engendered. From

his perspective, successful servant leadership required a deeply spiritual understanding of one's identity, mission, vision and environment. The servant leader was different from the leader who lusted after power to assuage a desire for dominance or to acquire material rewards.

Greenleaf suggested that a leader of the type he envisioned would act with integrity and spirit, build trust, help people grow and help shape the destinies of their followers by going ahead to show the way. From his perspective, the best test of servant leadership was to ask if those served grew personally and professionally, becoming healthier, wiser, more autonomous, able to take risks and in the end, more likely themselves to become servant leaders.

For Christians, this type of leadership is sometimes described as "leading like Jesus." Even a brief study of the Gospels alerts us to the fact that Jesus' leadership style stood in sharp contrast to the methods exercised by the Roman conquerors of Palestine, continues to stand in equally sharp contrast to the styles of political leadership found in many parts of today's world and, quite frankly, runs contrary to leadership as it is *de facto* practiced in many churches today. The leadership of Jesus remains counter-cultural, even as we make our way more than 2,000 years after his death. Unlike the bulk of world and church leaders, true servant leaders do not strive for personal honor or glory and place themselves at the service of others while serving a mission or a cause that is greater than themselves.

Dan R. Ebener, following his research on parish life in the Diocese of Davenport, Iowa, in 2005-2006, wrote *Servant Leadership Models for Your Parish*. This book challenges those who hold positional power at any level within a diocese or parish to examine themselves on the extent to which they rely on their position and its associated power to get things done, to determine if





their nature inclines them to dictate or to consult, and to assess to what extent they use persuasion or coercion to get others to follow their lead. He also asks leaders at any and all levels to examine their motives: desiring to serve God vs. wanting control, and to consider the response of their followers: are they enthusiastic or are they being dragged along?

Ebener's book identifies the two dimensions of leadership, task and relationship, noting that the leader who builds trust, increases commitment and develops a sense of cohesion among group members also gets the job done. From his perspective, power and service are the two elements that comprise servant leadership and are held in balance by the servant leader, enhancing each other in a paradoxical reconciliation of opposites. He views the servant-leader model as counter-intuitive because it defies the cultural norm of either/or thinking that splits along the lines of self-serving individualism vs. selfless collectivism through its embrace of the concepts of servant-oriented power and powerful service for the common good.

The Center for Servant Leadership (CSL) at the Pastoral Institute in Columbia, Georgia, for example, is committed to creating and sustaining servant leadership throughout organizations and institutions. CSL endeavors to advance the development of a caring and cooperating community, emphasizing service and involvement, a balanced approach to life and work and a sharing of responsibility and recognition. Its programs and partnerships help develop attitudes and skills of servant leaders among civic leaders, community organizers, business managers, professionals, college students, teenagers and children. It has identified servant leadership as a lifelong journey that includes discovery of one's self, a desire to serve others and a commitment to lead. Servant leaders continually work at developing such qualities as trustworthiness, self-awareness, humility, compassion and competence as they strive to foster visionary, empowering relationships in stewardship and community.

The Center for Vocation and Servant Leadership at Seton Hall University in New Jersey promotes openness to God's call in both the aca-

demie life and common life to support the overall mission of forming students as servant leaders for today's world. The Center advances Seton Hall's mission to prepare a new generation of leaders for church and society, by challenging the university community to be attentive to God's call, responsive to the common good and mindful of the example of Christ who came to serve and not to be served. The Center began in 2003, supported by a generous grant from the Lilly Endowment to further the goal of preparing the next generation of church leadership. The Center for Vocation and Servant Leadership does its work in cooperation with other campus organizations and by sponsoring several different programs including: faculty development; scholarships; retreats for students, faculty and alumni; spiritual outreach to students; local community development; service learning opportunities and the expression of faith through the arts.

A number of authors and consultants working in the area of leadership both in ministry and the business world have identified various qualities or virtues that are hallmarks of a servant



leader. At the head of nearly every list is the quality of active listening, followed by empathy, awareness of self and others, the ability to heal divisions, community building skills and a commitment to the growth of others by encouraging them to discover and utilize their gifts. Other qualities frequently mentioned include persuasion, conceptualization, foresight and stewardship.

These qualities have found a place in widely diverse settings. For example, the management culture of Southwest Airlines fosters leadership expectations that include developing people, building great teams, thinking strategically, striving for excellence and identification with the values of the company. One may be certain that this application of servant leadership, where a circle of shared power has replaced the pyramidal paradigm of power, has played a substantial role in moving Southwest Airlines to the forefront of the airlines industry.

At this critical time in the life of the church, bishops and other leaders could learn many lessons from Southwest Airlines and other companies committed to servant leadership. Those in charge of seminary training, religious formation and other pastoral ministry programs would do well to examine models of servant leadership training currently in place in various industry groups as well as at schools such as Seton Hall University, to name only one. The need to move from the former

model of clerical culture to a culture of collaboration and of servant leadership is imperative.

Addressing the need for servant leadership in the church following the devastating revelations of clerical sexual abuse of children, Carl Koch, writing in *America*, noted every seminarian, novice and lay pastoral leader should undergo intensive training in attentive listening as well as training in the art of persuasion, convincing through consensus-building rather than using their positions of authority coercively in decision-making situations. He visualized clergy as servant leaders, whose role would be to invite people into dialogue and discernment, realizing that more good can happen in an organization with the willing commitment of all organizational members than through forced compliance. He also urged that seminarians and other future pastoral ministers be trained in the art of stewardship, learning accountability for the well being of the church, parish or other ministry to which they are assigned by operating in service rather than through control. In these times, stewardship, the choice for service rather than for self-aggrandizement, is essential if the church is to regain its credibility. The whole church, we, the People of God, who are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation (1 Peter 2:9) by virtue of our Baptism, shall serve and be served best through partnership, rather than patriarchy.

## RECOMMENDED READING

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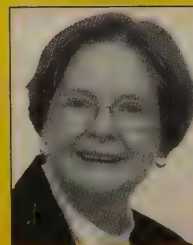
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I have been thinking long and hard on how we can form seminarians and religious for a chaste life as celibates. In this article I want to suggest what might be a fresh starting point for a program of formation for a chaste life. Although my focus here is on celibate chastity, what I am suggesting may have relevance for Christian formation in general.

The sexual revolution that began in the 1960s in the developed world has changed our cultural background beyond the imagining of our predecessors. Movies, television and other media took more and more liberties in using sexually explicit language and activity. The advertisement industry exploited this growing freedom to the point that many of the ads now seen by everyone, children included, would have been taboo fifty years ago. The women's liberation and gay rights' movements have transformed the culture of the developed world and, indeed, much of the rest of the world as well. The internet has made it possible to download sexually explicit material in the privacy of one's room or office anywhere in the world. In movies and television, often enough, it is taken for granted that falling in love leads directly to intercourse. According to the Guttmacher Institute, in the U.S. 70% of teenagers have intercourse before they reach the age of 19 (*The New York Times Magazine*, Nov. 20, 2011, p. 41). In our culture there is no longer a generally accepted moral consensus on what is acceptable sexual behavior. Everyone is affected by these cultural changes.

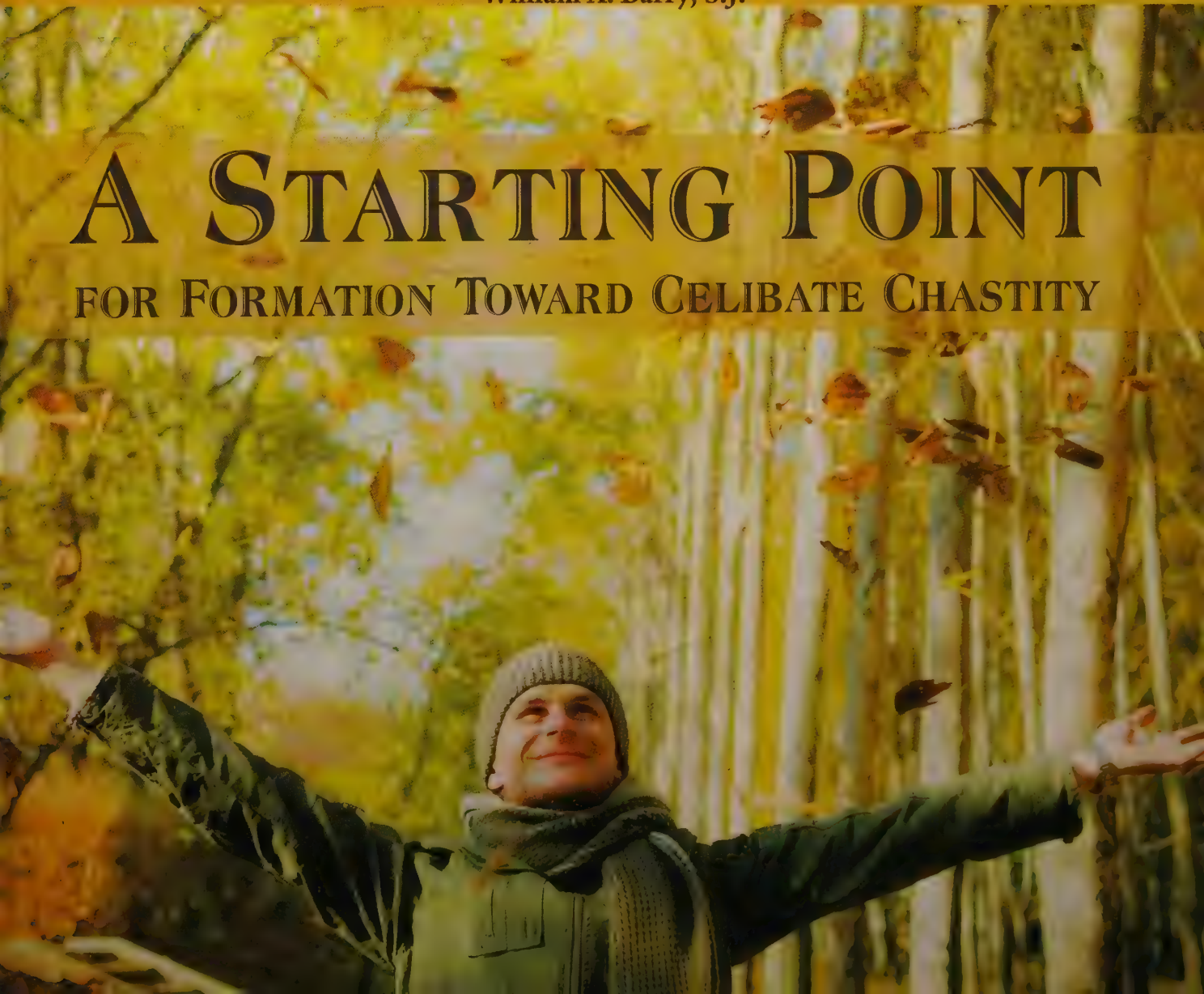
In addition, the sexual abuse crisis in the Roman Catholic Church has made celibate chastity questionable as an honorable enterprise and eroded much of the moral authority the Church had with regard to its teaching on sexual morality. As stories of such abuse continue to appear in different countries, this crisis has long ceased to be dismissed as an "American problem." Indeed, as more and more instances of sexual abuse in other hallowed institutions such as the Boy Scouts, sports programs and schools hit the news, it can no longer be dismissed by the larger society as a "Roman Catholic problem," or even a "problem of a celibate priesthood." We are faced with a worldwide crisis of how to form our children and young adults into mature sexual human beings.

Let me highlight the four last words, *mature sexual human beings*. This is really what I am concerned about in this article.

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# A STARTING POINT

## FOR FORMATION TOWARD CELIBATE CHASTITY





*Everything in the universe is an image of God. So a good starting point for a discussion of sexuality might well be to ask how sexuality mirrors God.*

## WHERE TO BEGIN?

As I began thinking about this topic, I went for a long walk and asked God to help me to know how to proceed. My first thoughts focused on the fact that God created us in his image and likeness. "Does this tell us anything about sexuality?" I asked. It seems that it does and that it gives us a better starting place for talking about sexuality.

Usually, conversation about sexuality starts with sex differences. In my walk I said to God: "What if we started with the question of what sexuality in itself reveals about you?" After all, in creating the universe God has no other model than self to follow. Everything in the universe is an image of God. So a good starting point for a discussion of sexuality might well be to ask how sexuality mirrors God. In the first chapter of Genesis we read, "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27). Clearly sex differences were in the mind of the final author of this section of Genesis, but the most important fact he underlined is that human beings are created in the image of God, including the fact that they are male and female.

One immediate conclusion, then, is that sexuality is not foreign to God, however strange that might seem. Sexuality in humans, other animals, birds and insects somehow reflects God. How? The obvious answer is that sexuality leads to procreation. God is fecund in creation, and he communicates this fecundity to creatures in the form of sexual differences that lead to procreation. Included in this gift of sexuality, however, is sexual attraction or desire that cannot lead to procreation, and here is where the image of God gets mysterious and quite interesting.

In humans, at least, sexual attraction is not, in all cases, tied to procreation. Married men and women are sexually attracted to one another even when procreation is not possible, such as during a woman's ovulation period before menopause and all the time after menopause. Children have some sexual attraction to their mothers and fathers, and mothers and fathers have been known to have some sexual attraction to

their little children. Before puberty boys and girls are sexually attracted to others. I can remember being attracted to an older female cousin when I was still a child, before I was ten; though I could not have said this at the time, this attraction had some erotic and sexual overtones. Moreover, through no choice of their own some adults find themselves sexually attracted to young children or to teenagers; some adult men and women, through no choice of their own, find themselves attracted to peers of their own gender. Finally sexual attraction plays a part in the attraction to God for many people, both past and present (cf. Burrus 2004). How do we explain sexual attraction that is not tied to procreation as saying something about the nature of God?

Perhaps we can learn something from the emerging field of the theology of eros. In this field the study of sexuality starts from desire, not sexuality itself. Scholars in this growing field take issue with the influential thesis of Anders Nygren, who believed that "the essentially Christian concept of love, or agape, originally had no more to do with the essentially Platonic or Greek concept of desire, or eros, than it did, in his view, with the essentially Jewish concept of law" (cited in Burrus, 2006, xiii-xiv).

The usual theories of eros start with the notion of lack, presupposing that eros wants what it does not have. A child sees another child asking for a toy and wants the same toy. So desire, eros, begins with a perceived lack. On this presupposition, I presume, Nygren and others posit that eros cannot be predicated of God, who lacks nothing.

But does this presupposition fit the reality of biblical revelation? The first chapter of Genesis tells the story of God creating joyously and lavishly; six times we read, "God saw that it was good." Finally, after creating human beings in the divine image, we read, "God saw that it was very good." Chapter two of Genesis tells a different story of creation in which God creates a garden of enormous bounty that the man and woman are given to tend and to enjoy. In these stories everything exists because God desires it into existence; and everything we are and have is, therefore, gift. From this perspective we start with God's



desire (eros) which arises from fullness, not lack, and which leads to the existence of our universe and everything in it. In other words, God's creative desire results in gifts abounding, a world that lacks nothing. No doubt we do desire things that we lack. But this is not how God desires, and we are made in the image of God. So it is not necessary to reduce desire to lack. Perhaps we need to let God wean us from this kind of desiring so that we grow into desiring as God desires. The theologian Mario Costa writes: "From the perspective of the divine, it is God's desire that prompts the giving of gifts. God's desire is (pro)creative, but not in the imposition of God's will upon the creation..., but in luring the creation into relationship through the giving of gifts" (61).

So we might start our formation program for mature sexual human beings by focusing on God's eros, the desire that creates us in order to lure us, through lavish gift-giving, into a relationship of love. God is not a despot who forces creation to conform to his dream, but a lover who desires a world of creatures who embrace that dream as freely as they can. God is the God of possibilities, of choices, not a God of necessities. One of the translations of YHWH, the divine name God shares with Moses at the burning bush, is "I will be what I will be" (Exodus 3:14). In this reading God's eros creates possibilities, possibilities that creation can try to thwart or subvert. By creating the world as it is, God becomes vulnerable to creation, needing the cooperation of what is created in order to attain what he intends. God must allure us, must attract us in order to bring about what Jesus called the Kingdom of God. Attraction, then, becomes God's way of creating, sustaining and moving the universe toward the divine intention. This way of thinking puts eros at the heart of reality because it is at the heart of God's creative intention. With this line of thought we can rescue the word "lover" from its modern connotation of the illicit. God is lover *par excellence*, and thereby we are all invited to become lovers in God's image.

This starting point places eros and sexuality in a positive light from the start. Our eros is but a pale reflection of

the divine eros that brought us into being for a relationship of friendship and love. From the start we would be focusing on the God revealed in the Bible, not on a philosophical notion of God. The God of the Bible is not the Unmoved Mover, but a God of passion and fire who loves creation madly. God takes a great risk in creating our universe, a universe of chance and probabilities, of choice and free will. The Bible tells the story of that risk and of the great price God is prepared to pay in order to lure us into a relationship of friendship and cooperation. God asks us to join in this risk, to live as divine images. Part of that risk requires that we learn how to be images of God precisely as sexual human beings.

God's desire for us creates in us a reciprocal desire for God, a great longing that, Augustine said, leaves us restless until we rest in him. In his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, C. S. Lewis notes that every so often we are overcome by a feeling of enormous well-being and a desire for "we know not what." This desire is what he calls joy, and he describes it in other writings as more satisfying than the fulfillment of any other desire, even though this desire cannot be fully satisfied this side of death. Such experiences of "joy" are, I believe, experiences of God's ongoing desire for us that creates and sustains us; they evoke in us a reciprocal desire for God.

Here is an example of the welling up of such a desire in an ordinary experience, one that any teen-ager might have. In his autobiographical memoir, *The Sacred Journey*, Frederick Buechner recalls an experience he had in Bermuda where his mother had taken him and his brother after his father's tragic suicide. At thirteen, near the end of his stay, he was sitting with a girl of thirteen on a wall watching ferries come and go. Quite innocently, he says:

Our bare knees happened to touch for a moment, and in that moment I was filled with such a sweet panic and anguish of longing for I had no idea what, that I knew my life could never be complete until I found it. . . . It was the upward-reaching and fathomlessly hungering, heart-

breaking love for the beauty of the world at its most beautiful, and, beyond that, for that beauty east of the sun and west of the moon which is past the reach of all but our most desperate desiring and is finally the beauty of Beauty itself, of Being itself and what lies at the heart of Being (52).

Buechner himself notes that there are many ways of looking at this experience. He recognizes the possibilities of psychological and sexual influences. He goes on to say, however, that "looking back at those distant years I choose not to deny, either, the compelling sense of an unseen giver and a series of hidden gifts as not only another part of their reality, but the deepest part of all" (p. 52). Note that the experience has erotic and sexual overtones, but that at bottom Buechner interprets it as God's way of attracting him.

So I propose that we start a formation program for mature sexual human beings with God's creative and sustaining eros and our own eros for God. God wants us, wants our friendship and our cooperation. And he makes us capable of that friendship by creating us in his own image and likeness. Desire, with its erotic and sexual components, lies at the heart of creation. Hence, the question is not, "how do we control our erotic and sexual impulses?" but "how do we let God lead us to desire and to love as he desires and loves?"

## GOD'S ALLURE

Our attractions to worldly beauty, including people, may be God's way of drawing us to himself. At least this is the message I draw from Karmen MacKendrick's article "Carthage Didn't Burn Hot Enough: Saint Augustine's Divine Seduction." She notes that seduction is not the same as coercion. If I want to seduce you, I try to convince you by my ways of acting that you really want what I want; in other words, seduction aims at a mutuality of desire. Moreover, if I have to seduce you, I recognize that there are other possibilities for you; hence, if I want to draw you to me, I have to woo you away



from those other possibilities. MacKendrick shows that Augustine sees God as seducer. And God seduces by the beauty of the world. God wants us to be attracted by the beauty of the world so that we can be drawn to the ever-greater beauty of God. This drawing God accomplishes not by turning us away from the worldly beauty, nor by hinting that we ought to look for the Creator, nor by simply representing the Creator. "Rather, the world can lead us into its own beauties and please us there, or it can turn us constantly toward the further seduction at which it always hints—a seduction already there, a different, more mysterious manner of enjoyment" (p. 211). In MacKendrick's reading of Augustine God wants us to be seduced by the beauty of the world; if we are not attracted by its beauty, we will never be attracted by God's. Augustine found the world very attractive indeed and continued to find it so even after his conversion. But this beauty, he found, produced in him something much deeper and more intense: the desire for the unnamable and mysterious Other we call God. The desire for worldly beauties could for a time be satisfied, but the desire returned. The desire for God was never satisfied, but it was more satisfying than the satisfaction of any other desire. This desire is, I believe, what MacKendrick refers to with the words "a different, more mysterious manner of enjoyment."

Augustine found himself strongly attracted by the beauty of the world, but in the process of yielding to this world's attractions he found something else, a desire for he knew not what which he ultimately named God, a desire that was extremely intense and even painful, but nonetheless so powerful that he could not ultimately be satisfied by any other beauty. The path to this deeper desire is not reason, nor finding that the beauties of this world are really nothing. Rather, suggests MacKendrick, the path is seduction, namely "that the turn toward God is an attempt to sustain the seductiveness of the world rather than allowing desire to be stopped and satisfied in worldly beauty" (p. 211). In other words, worldly beauty, including the beauty of other persons,

should never lose its attractiveness; it always remains God's means of seducing us. After all, "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed it was very good" (Genesis 1:31). We must never forget this and must take it seriously in our formation of men and women for celibate chastity.

I have been wondering why this "unfulfilled" desire for God creates such happiness that C. S. Lewis could call the desire "joy" and say that, even though unfulfilled in this life, it is more fulfilling than the fulfillment of any other desire. I have met many people who have experienced such joy, even ecstasy, in the sensed presence of God. The experience does not last long, but it is deeply fulfilling and leaves people feeling that they have experienced something of heavenly bliss. Why can we not say that at such times we get inklings of the truth that everything is one in God's love, and that, therefore, there is literally nothing to fear, even death? The truth of things is that we exist in God, and nothing exists apart from God. The Wisdom of Solomon says to God: "For you love things that exist, and detest none of the things that you have made, for you would not have made anything if you had hated it. . . . You spare all things, for they are yours, O Lord, you who love the living" (Wisdom 11:24-26). In other words, at all times we are in God's loving presence, even if most of the time we are not aware of this reality. When we do become aware of it, we faint for joy. And the beauty of this world often is the way to this awareness.

#### HOW DO WE LET GOD LEAD US?

If what I have written so far is valid, then at every moment of existence God is drawing every one of us toward union, union with God, with one another and with the whole of creation, and this drawing is erotic and even sexual. Thus, as I noted at the beginning, Christian formation for every person might start with this presupposition. So now we come to the issue of formation for celibate chastity. Here, I would say that religious need to be convinced that God wants them to become religious, and Roman Catholic seminarians that God







wants them to be unmarried priests in the Latin Rite, and that this desire of God is for their happiness and consolation. If celibate chastity is to be embraced, it has to be seen as a good thing that God desires for me. Hence, spiritual directors and vocation personnel need to do everything they can to help people who enter seminaries and religious congregations realize that it is God's desire for them that ultimately matters. Discerning God's desire requires that they be willing to pay attention to the movements of their hearts and minds; these movements are God's privileged way of revealing his desire. Among these movements are erotic and sexual attractions. These, too, require attention and discernment in prayer and reflection. Learning to pay attention to these movements is a life-long process.

This learning to pay attention is immensely helped by being honest with God about sexual and erotic feelings, fantasies and desires. Only God can lead anyone toward a mature celibate chastity. But to engage honestly with God about these matters, finding a trusted spiritual director is a necessity. In other words, formation for celibate chastity must begin with convincing young religious and Latin Rite seminarians that honesty with God and with a spiritual director is the best policy for them. However, they will only entrust themselves in this way if they trust that the spiritual director is only interested in God's desire and their real good. Such trust does not come easily, but if the formation program is to work, this trust must be earned by spiritual directors. The latter presumption puts a great onus on bishops and major superiors to choose as spiritual directors men and women whom the seminarians and religious can really trust.

Bishops and major superiors will have to make sure that those appointed to positions of leadership and spiritual direction have developed into men and women of some ease with their own sexuality and know how their own attractions have led them to such ease and to a deeper relationship with Jesus. We might want to find out how the spiritual directors we appoint or suggest to our young people deal with sexuality in

spiritual direction. Too often young people have tried to speak of sexual issues with a spiritual director and were turned off by the embarrassment or reticence of the director and/or by his or her immediate reversion to issues of morality. Trust is easily bruised by insensitivity on the part of the one who is trusted, and it is not easily regained.

In my article "Telling God the Truth about Our Sexuality" (*HUMAN DEVELOPMENT*, Winter 2010), I sketched some further points on speaking honestly with God about sexuality, thereby giving God a better chance of educating us toward becoming more mature sexual images of God. I hope that we can continue this conversation so crucial not only for the formation of mature priests and religious, but also for the formation of mature human beings.

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# The 2005 Vatican Instruction on Homosexuality in Seminaries: Are We In a "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" World on This Topic?

While the official policy from the Vatican is to exclude homosexual men from entering seminary, the best available research data suggest that there are a sizeable number of homosexual men who are priests. The purpose of this brief article is to outline some of the difficult challenges that this policy poses for psychologists and other mental health professionals who are asked to conduct in-depth psychological screening evaluations for applicants to seminary and to ordination. When psychologists are asked to determine candidates psychological and behavioral suitability for seminary admission and ordination, they are confronted with both the official position of the church regarding homosexuality and the reality of the psychosexual experiences and tendencies among those who seek admission to seminary. Given the fact that so many homosexual men seek ordained ministry in the church, psychologists are put in a position of evaluating their psychosexual maturity, development and behavior knowing that their evaluation may be the determining factor that excludes a candidate.







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Psychologists, like all Catholics, understand that to be engaged with and active in the Roman Catholic Church one must live with and be at some peace with certain contradictions and ambiguity. For example, while the position of the church is clear that Catholics should not use contraception, the vast majority of American Catholic couples report that they do in fact use contraception. Likewise, while the Catholic position on marriage is that it is a lifelong commitment, statistics show that Catholic couples divorce at levels similar to non-Catholics. And while the church forbids homosexuality among those in ordained ministry, research from multiple sources suggest that there are large numbers of priests with a homosexual orientation.

## BACKGROUND

In November 2005 the Vatican published "Instruction Concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with Regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies in View of Their Admission to the Seminary and to Holy Orders." It received a great deal of international press attention because it made it clear that men with "deep-rooted homosexual tendencies" could not be admitted to the seminary and ordained as priests in the Roman Catholic Church, stating that homosexual acts are "objectively disordered" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2005). The instruction states that the church "may not admit to the seminary and Holy Orders those who practice homosexuality, show profoundly deep-rooted homosexual tendencies, or support the so-called gay culture." Having deep-rooted homosexual tendencies means that he clearly identifies and understands his sexual orientation as homosexual in nature, and not transient or a matter of experimentation. While the 2005 Vatican instruction was not a new position for the church, it received attention because it made it very clear that homosexual men were not welcome in seminaries nor as priests in the church.

The Vatican instruction made no mention of the sexual abuse crisis in the church, yet many news outlets and

church commentators connected the release of the 2005 Vatican statement with the ongoing clergy abuse crisis in the United States and elsewhere that began in January 2002. In fact, several high-ranking Vatican officials made statements that connected homosexuality and the clergy abuse crisis, including Vatican psychiatrist and former director of the Vatican press office, Dr. Joaquin Navarro Valls, who made clear that being homosexual and being a priest were incompatible. Additionally, since 80% of the victims of clergy sexual abuse in the United States were reported to be males (John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 2004, 2011) many attributed the sexual abuse crisis to the behavior of homosexual men who are priests. The logic was that if homosexual men were barred from the priesthood, the odds of children being sexually violated would be greatly reduced.

Although the Vatican insists that homosexual men should not be priests, data suggest that there are large numbers of homosexual men in the Roman Catholic priesthood. Most research studies currently available suggest that somewhere between 25% and 50% of priests are homosexual in orientation (Cozzens, 2000; Plante, 2007a, 2007b, Sipe, 1990). With about 40,000 Catholic priests in the United States, estimates suggest that there are approximately 10,000 to 20,000 homosexual priests in America.

It is impossible to know for sure exactly how many priests are homosexual since available data rely on self-report information from modest sample sizes, but all published studies in this area estimate that the Roman Catholic priesthood includes a percentage of homosexual men that is at least five times the national average for men. No matter how you examine the currently available research data, there are a lot of homosexual men in the Roman Catholic priesthood.

What do we really know about homosexual priests? Several quality research studies have been conducted and published in reputable professional outlets such as peer-reviewed journals. Most studies have found that they are psychologically healthy and do not have

significant psychological or personality differences relative to heterosexual priests (e.g., Plante, 2007b). Many of these studies report that these men do experience struggles with the Catholic Church's position on homosexual priests and homosexuality in general and thus must keep their orientation and perspectives quiet. They remain "in the closet" with limited opportunities to discuss and process their experiences outside of their most trusted friends and peers.

Since most quality empirical research suggests that about 5% of the American population of men are homosexual in orientation, the odds of a Roman Catholic priest being homosexual is estimated to be up to ten times the national average for men. One must then assume that if the high incidence of homosexual men in the priesthood is correct, then a sizeable number of bishops and cardinals have been or are homosexual (Plante, 2007a). While we don't know for sure, from a statistical and probability standpoint, there may well be many high-ranking homosexual men in the Vatican and throughout the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church. Again, to be engaged with the Catholic Church one must be at peace with contradictions and ambiguity.

It should be made clear that there is no research that homosexual orientation puts children at risk for sexual abuse or any other kinds of abuse or harm. The American Psychological Association as well as other professional organizations such as the American Psychiatric Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics have made clear in their review of the professional literature and in their various position statements and task force reports that homosexuality is not a disorder (psychiatric or otherwise) and is not a risk factor for child abuse or criminal behavior of any kind. Yet, discrimination based on sexual orientation does cause stress and harm to those with a homosexual orientation. Although not referring to or acknowledging the psychological or criminal justice professional literature, the Vatican instruction considers homosexuality to be "disordered" as well as against "natural law." While the





church is entitled to its point of view, it appears to contradict what all of the major professional organizations in psychology, psychiatry and pediatrics have concluded.

#### THE PSYCHOLOGIST'S DILEMMA

So, where does all this leave those who conduct psychological evaluations for the Roman Catholic Church in screening applicants for seminary? The Vatican released an important document in June 2008 called "Guidelines for the Use of Psychology in the Admission and Formation of Candidates for the Priesthood." The document not only stated that psychological services including evaluations of applicants to seminary and ordained life can be used, it actually encouraged them stating, "to arrive at a correct evaluation of the candidate's personality, the expert can have recourse to both interviews and tests. These must always be carried out with the previous, explicit, informed and free consent of the candidate" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2008). It appears that psychologists or other mental health professionals such as psychiatrists conducting psychological or psychiatric screening evaluations for the church are in a challenging bind as to how to best evaluate applicants'

psychosexual development and functioning. A careful psychological evaluation needs to address psychosexual development, maturity and behavior, and so questions about sexuality, sexual experience and intimate relationships are needed in conducting a complete and thoughtful evaluation. Yet, if an applicant states that his sexual orientation is homosexual then he may be disqualified for admittance to a Catholic seminary under the Vatican instruction. Do psychologists and other evaluators want to be in a position of "outing" homosexual applicants for seminary and the priesthood? Is that their role and responsibility? What should an evaluator do? There are several options to consider.

Option 1: Conduct a complete psychological evaluation and let the chips fall where they may.

One potential approach is to conduct a complete psychological evaluation including detailed information about sexual experiences, behavior, orientation, intimate relationship history and psychosexual maturity and let the vocation director, diocese, religious order or seminary do with the report as they see fit. The downside to this approach is that there is now a written report stating that an applicant is homosexual. This

puts the decision squarely on church officials and not on the mental health professional evaluator.

Option 2: Conduct a modified psychological evaluation without discussing sexual orientation or behavior.

This approach pursues a "don't ask, don't tell" policy. An evaluation would include psychological and personality functioning but would omit any discussion of sexuality and sexual history. The problem with this approach is that avoiding sexual orientation and behavior prevents a complete evaluation of an applicant's psychosexual functioning, maturity and development. It provides a partial but not complete evaluation. Leaving out information about psychosexual development and behavior leaves a huge hole in the evaluation, and does not provide enough information for the vocation director or other church official to make an informed decision regarding an applicant's suitability for priesthood.

Option 3: Conduct a complete psychological evaluation but don't put sexual orientation in writing.

This approach maneuvers around the problem of an incomplete evaluation and simply omits sexual orientation



in the final evaluation report document. References to psychosexual development, behavior and orientation would be written in a gender-neutral manner. For example, comments such as "the applicant reports maintaining several healthy intimate relationships during his college years with the most recent relationship terminated several years ago as he discerned his called to ordained ministry" avoids any mention of the gender of the applicant's relationships. This allows for a complete psychological evaluation but is careful not to "out" an applicant by avoiding any references to sexual orientation or to the gender of his sexual partner. If church officials want to know sexual orientation, they can simply ask this particular question of the applicant themselves and keep mental health professionals out of this conversation.

Each of the three options noted above have significant troubles with them. None are perfect solutions. The professional conducting the evaluation must adhere to professional ethics and not engage, for example, in prejudice and bias based on sexual orientation or other forms of diversity. While the Catholic Church has the right to select only chaste heterosexual men as applicants for ordained ministry, it proves problematic for psychologists and other mental health professionals to be forced to collude and "out" homosexual men who might be discriminated against. It is also problematic for psychologists to conduct psychological evaluations that are incomplete by following a "don't ask, don't tell" policy. For me, Option 3 is the best one available but is far from perfect or satisfying.

In my clinical practice I have conducted almost seven hundred evaluations among applicants to ordained ministry as priests or deacons in both the Roman Catholic and Episcopal Churches. Thus far when discussing these issues and concerns with vocation directors and seminary admission committees in the Catholic Church, a satisfying answer to these dilemmas has been elusive and continues to be so even seven years after the publication of the 2005 Vatican

instruction. Most psychologists have suggested using a "don't ask, don't tell" policy or conducting a complete psychological evaluation that includes psychosexual development questions but does not articulate a sexual orientation in any written documents. Concerns have been expressed that something in writing may come back to haunt people (including seminary applicants, vocation directors, seminary rectors and seminary presidents) many years after an evaluation was completed. Reports may stay in files for decades and it is hard to predict how they might be used in the future. One vocation director that I have worked with for many years has all evaluation reports destroyed once a decision is made about admission to seminary. Additionally, some vocation directors have worried about future bishops who may be more adamant about the Vatican instruction. Again, a satisfying answer is sadly elusive.

Many vocation directors that I have worked with state that they aren't overly concerned about sexual orientation among those applying for seminary admission but are very concerned about ensuring that all seminarians can live a life that includes celibate chastity, are psychosexually well-integrated and mature, and are not at risk of harming others (adults or children) in a sexual manner. They want psychologically healthy men who can manage their impulses regardless of their sexual orientation. This perspective seems reasonable and healthy though it is at odds with a strict reading of the 2005 Vatican instruction.

As noted earlier, contradictions exist within the Catholic Church and finding a level of comfort and peace while living with these contradictions is a challenging task. Having strong, open relationships with vocation directors and other church officials is a good place to start. I hope others will share with me how they approach this dilemma.

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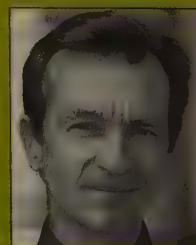
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# *Responding to Fear in These Troubled Times*

**Len Sperry, M.D, Ph.D.**

American society today is increasingly consumed by fear and anxiety. Many are pessimistic about the economy, government debt, rising costs, foreclosures and stock market instability. Economic, education and health-care reform have become pressing political issues. Employment insecurity, layoffs and plant closings have affected all sectors of society. The psychological contract between employee and employer, where an employer provides long term employment and benefits in return for an employee's loyalty and high work ethic, is no longer the norm. Crime rates, violence and victimization have increasingly reduced a felt sense of community security. Globalization, political instability and the war on terror heighten the realization that the world is unsafe. Diminished confidence and distrust in our social systems has become painfully apparent. When trust is not present individuals are likely to experience fear and anxiety. Furthermore, the experience of fear and anxiety is contagious. It spreads in families, neighborhoods, workplaces and, most unfortunately, in ministry settings.



A culture of fear is increasingly evident in some dioceses and provinces. Fearing allegations some priests now limit how they minister. Even an innocent handshake with a young person may be withheld because of fear. Decreased vocations and increased retirement of priests engender fear regarding the future of Catholicism. So, too, do news reports of bankruptcies of church institutions, provinces and dioceses—even just talk of this possibility. Will the vocation crisis, fewer priests and bankruptcies negatively affect the capacity of the church to carry out its many ministries? So many unknowns and uncertainties affect the lives of an increasing number of Catholics today.

While most react negatively to these and other fear-provoking concerns, it is possible to respond in a neutral and even positive manner. That's right: respond versus react. Despite the bleak and pessimistic portrait of life today that the mass media presents 24/7, there are some compelling reasons to be optimistic and to respond positively or at least neutrally.

This article describes several perspectives helpful in understanding the fear and anxiety experienced by so many during these troubled times. It begins with the psychological perspective on fear and anxiety followed by the

neurobiological mechanism of fear. Next, an historical overview provides a broader context in which to more accurately view the present and the future. Then, a theological perspective reminds us of the basis for a sense of hope and reassurance for responding to fear instead of merely reacting to it. Finally, some implications of these perspectives are discussed with particular reference to ministry personnel and parents.

### PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

While most of us tend to use the terms anxiety and fear interchangeably, distinctions between these states are often made. For example, individuals make a linguistic distinction between the two. They say they have fear of something, such as flying or aging, but also indicate they experience anxiety about flying or getting older. There is also a psycho-physiological distinction that can be made between the two. For example, the experience of an intruder thrusting a gun into your back—fear—is qualitatively different from the tightness in your throat and butterflies in your stomach as you anticipate having a difficult conversation with your boss—*anxiety*.

Fear is the term that psychologists use to designate the emotional response

to a real, known or definite threat, whereas the term *anxiety* is used to designate the lingering anticipation and apprehension or the chronic sense of worry and tension for an imagined, unknown or indefinite threat. Although the focus may be different—real vs. imagined danger—fear and anxiety are interrelated. Anxiety can cause fear, and fear causes anxiety. This subtle distinction between the two states can be useful to clinicians in assessing symptoms and planning treatment strategies. For the remainder of this article however, the two terms will be used synonymously.

### NEUROBIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The amygdala is part of the brain that, along with the hippocampus, generates primal emotions such as anger, rage and fear. The amygdala functions as an early warning system on high alert for threats to survival. The neural circuits of the amygdala are among the fastest in the nervous system. They can react to potential threats in less than 100 milliseconds while the neural circuits in the executive centers of the prefrontal cortex of the brain take 500-600 milliseconds to react. Think of it, this more primitive part of the brain reacts five or more times faster than the





thinking part of the brain can respond. This means that by the time we become consciously aware of a situation, it has been processed several times in this more primitive region of the brain, activating memories and triggering neural patterns organized by past learning. As we become aware of the outcomes of the amygdala's reactive process, however, we experience them as if they are happening in the present moment. The amygdala's extraordinary effectiveness in focusing on threats comes at a big price: it inadvertently and consistently filters out good news and other non-threats.

Now, threats can be actual or they can be probable. Today, many dangers and threats we face are probable. For example, another recession might occur this year, terrorists could attack a major U.S. city or another monster hurricane like Katrina could strike. Unfortunately, the amygdala cannot tell the difference between an actual and a probable threat. Thus, it can and does remain on high alert during stressful times. This means that individuals will experience all the negative physiological and psychological aftereffects associated with an activated amygdala.

The neural circuits of the amygdala involved with fear can recall all previous threats and anticipate them in future situations. To further complicate matters, these fear circuits are unable to distinguish between real and imagined danger. Fear can also result in regressed thinking and emotional rigidity, which in turn makes fear more difficult to overcome. For example, there are different levels of cognitive development and thinking that are influenced primarily by either the amygdala-hippocampus or the cortex regions of the brain. These include pre-operational (emotional thinking), concrete operational (categorical, either-or thinking), formal operational (logical thinking), and post-formal (thinking that is logical, intuitive and nuanced). In situations marked by sustained fear, it has been observed that individuals easily regress to a prior level of thinking. That means that those who function mostly as concrete and categorical thinkers are likely to become more pre-operational

and emotionally focused in their thinking. Because the majority of voters function largely at the categorical thinking level, it should not be surprising that fear-focused TV ads effectively activate the neural circuits of fear which effectively regress those watching back to emotional thinking. This leads to emotional voting based on fear rather than on information and logic. This is not surprising given that fear-based ad campaigns activate the amygdala.

Fortunately, the circuits of the amygdala and the surrounding hippocampal region of the brain are modifiable, a process called neuroplasticity. Recent research shows that elements of effective psychotherapy such as a therapist's warmth, empathy and positive regard, along with therapeutic discussion, can create a mental state that fosters neuroplasticity and can reactivate networks of new learning in both the prefrontal cortex and the hippocampus (Cozolino, 2002). These fear-amygdala circuits can also be turned down and off when mediated by any number of slowly repeated phrases and prayers such as "I am calm and at peace" or "I am resting in the Lord." These thoughts activate cortical circuits in the brain, allowing for higher-level responses.

#### HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The post-World War II era was a time of significant social unrest and upheaval as most of the world recovered from war. The era was dubbed the Age of Anxiety by Rollo May. May, an existential psychologist, observed that the 1950s, despite all the fears and anxieties associated with it, gave rise to a new-found sense of freedom. While this new freedom afforded increased responsibilities, choices and personal development, its inescapable consequence was more anxiety. In other words, the capacity to make choices often resulted in anxious self-doubt over the appropriateness of the choice made. May argued that existential anxiety was a constructive form of anxiety related to one's personal freedom and the

*In situations marked by sustained fear, it has been observed that individuals easily regress to a prior level of thinking.*



Particularly in these troubling times, ministry personnel would do well to inform their listeners of human beings' proclivity—their neurobiological, hardwired proclivity—to focus on the negative, and of the media's preoccupation with negativity.

awareness of the consequences of one's decisions. This new freedom of choice required courage, which he defined as "the capacity to meet the anxiety which arises as one achieves freedom. It is the willingness to differentiate, to move from the protecting realms of parental dependence to new levels of freedom and integration" (May, 1981, p. 169). Many would agree that we are most likely experiencing a new age of anxiety today, an age of mounting rates of clinical anxiety and psychopathology and an era of economic deprivation and scarcity. Ironically, Americans today believe that they are experiencing not an increase, but an actual decrease in freedom and choice.

In contrast to this prediction of scarcity is a vision of abundance. In their book, *Abundance: The Future is Better than You Think*, Peter Diamandis and Steven Kotler provide a broad perspective on life today that offers a compellingly optimistic alternative to the pessimistic, crisis-riddled view of many, if not most, Americans. These authors chronicle the many ways in which life has improved in the past decades and will continue to improve. "We are now entering a period of radical transformation. Progress in artificial intelligence, robotics, infinite computing, ubiquitous broadband networks, digital manufacturing, nanomaterials, synthetic biology and many other breakthrough technologies will let us make greater gains in the next two decades than we've made in the previous 200 years. We will soon have the ability to meet and exceed the basic needs of every man, woman and child on the planet" (Diamandis and Kotler, 2012). It is not surprising that this best-selling book is offering hope to many today. But, it is far from the only cause for hope.

#### THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

A theological view of fear provides fascinating insights. Canon law states that fear, to a greater or lesser degree, diminishes freedom of action. In scripture the most common admonition in the Old and New Testament is not to love another, but rather to avoid

fear. Perhaps this admonition stems from the fact that humankind has struggled with fear since its beginning. Fear is part of the human condition for all, including Christians.

In the New Testament (Mark 5:35ff and Luke 8:50), in responding to news of the death of Jarius' daughter, Jesus said to the distraught family, "Do not be afraid, just have faith." Another translation is: "Fear is useless; what is needed is trust." The liturgy of Holy Week is largely centered on this fear-faith dynamic. Having spoken of the troubles that the apostles can anticipate as His followers, Jesus explains, "I have told you all this so that you may not fall away. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid. Take courage, for I have conquered the world." The liturgies of this week call us to deepen our courage instead of being intimidated or afraid, and to put our trust in God who provides for all our spiritual and material needs.

This admonition of faith over fear is not limited to Holy Week. Throughout the year, homilies and teachings can incisively cut through fearfulness and pessimism and instead focus and remind us of the Lord's continuous admonition to have faith and not to fear. Particularly in these troubling times, ministry personnel would do well to inform their listeners of human beings' proclivity—their neurobiological, hardwired proclivity—to focus on the negative, and of the media's preoccupation with negativity. They can add that fearfulness effectively reduces individuals' capacity for optimism as well as critical analysis. Homilists and teachers can bring to their listeners' attention, without endorsing a position or candidate, awareness that political advisors intentionally stage negative campaigns knowing that they can capitalize on the fear and pessimism engendered in voters by negative messages.

The reality is that many ministers share the same worries and concerns of most Americans. Through their words, actions, and demeanor ministry personnel are not very different from those to whom they minister in their



response to the negativity in society. Why is it that so few homilists and teachers fail to deal more effectively with the scriptural admonition against fear? Is it because these ministers are being politically correct? Are they uninformed about the dynamics of fear, do they possess little or no courage, or do they have little or no hope for the future? At the present, there are many opinions but no research that provides answers. While research may eventually answer this question, it would seem more useful for ministry personnel to be mindful of the dynamics of fear, and to hold up the option of responding rather than merely reacting to fear. Even without a knowledge of the neurobiology of fear, ministry personnel could help others to effectively reduce and short-circuit fear by recommending that individuals limit their exposure to negativity—to watch, read and listen to fewer news reports that are decidedly negative—and to engage in positive self-talk and prayer, which can limit fearfulness and foster faithfulness.

While it is true that humans are wired to focus on negativity and respond with fear and pessimism, this phenomenon can be cognitively overridden. As already noted, knowledge, deliberate self-talk, prayer and faith provide override strategies. Among other resources, the book, *Abundance: The Future Is Better Than You Think*, noted earlier, provides the antithesis of the fear/scarcity/pessimism viewpoint. Of course, the Christian vision of life and grace, the gift of faith and scriptural admonitions not to fear but to trust God are other very powerful strategies to overcome fear.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR MINISTRY AND FOR PARENTING

Rollo May (1953) insisted that individuals can and must deal effectively with the anxiety surrounding them. He believed that a person with inner strength exerts a calming influence. "This is what our society needs, not new ideas and inventions . . . and not geniuses and supermen, but persons who can be, that is, persons who have a center of strength within themselves" (p. 54). In

order to meet the demands of the time, he called for such persons of strength to exert a calming influence on those around them. Today, this message can be viewed as a direct and immediate call to ministry personnel and to parents. The challenge is to respond to fear and anxiety from an inner center of strength reflecting faith, trust and courage with calmness, equanimity and composure. Ministers can model responding to fear with faithfulness, hopefulness, courage and resiliency, and serve as a secure base to support those who struggle to find or reclaim their inner resources. Parents can model for their children how to positively respond, rather than react, to fears, anxieties and everyday life stressors with that same sense of faithfulness, hopefulness, courage, and resiliency.

## CONCLUDING NOTE

There are two strikingly different views of life today: one of great fear of the future, of turmoil, scarcity and pessimism, and the other of faith in God and the future, of abundance and optimism. Even though hardwired to focus more on the negative than the positive, individuals can react or they can respond to fear. Whatever the promise that science and technology bring, faith, hope and love are cornerstones of effective ministry and parenting today and tomorrow. Ministry personnel and parents can react with fearfulness, discouragement and pessimism or they can respond with faithfulness, encouragement and optimism. In short, they can model fear or they can model faith.

## RECOMMENDED READING

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# Quiet Yeast





## Margaret Cessna, H.M.

**W**e sisters did everything that we were told to do. And we loved *doing* what we were told to do. Early to bed and very early to rise. First to open the school. To staff the hospital ward. To put order into the sacristy. To serve our pastor or chaplain. We were ready and energized to help build the kingdom.

And then Vatican II happened. John XXIII kept his promise and opened windows. Fresh air flowed through where we lived and where we worked. It flowed through where we worshipped before someone shut the windows.

We embraced the challenge of Vatican II. We changed our habit, horarium, and ministries but perhaps most importantly we changed the way we thought. Many of us walked the streets instead of the cloistered halls. We worked in soup kitchens and urban schools. We marched for peace and civil rights—for the end of poverty. For life and against death. We organized and collaborated. Boycotted. Wrote letters. Called the White House. Visited Congress and state capitals.

Those indeed were our “salad days” when we were green in years but filled with spirit, with heart, with energy, with passion. We so wanted to move mountains and to quiet raging seas. Arm in arm, shoulder to shoulder, we did our best to serve and to advocate for those most in need. But there was always more to do.

All this time we kept an eye on the church as it seemed to be slipping backward. Patriarchy. Exclusion of women. Abuse of gays. Threats through investigation. And then, the children. How could the abusers be so protected by the church that we had loved for so long? For some, this was the final straw. But for others, it is our church still, even as we watch a sad decline in truth and honor. And hope and pray for a new John XXIII.

We slowly grew older. A little tired. Perhaps wiser.

We have become quiet yeast now, a source of activity, not readily seen,

but working nonetheless. Not the kind that moves mountains or calms raging seas. Quiet yeast. The kind that soothes a grieving heart. That helps to ease physical pain one person at a time. That tutors and encourages a bright youngster to do her best. That drives senior citizens to the doctor or store. That holds the hand of a dying patient. That welcomes a refugee to America. That works to end human trafficking. That plays cards with even older people in a way that comforts them and lets them know that they are still an important part of community. The kind that directs and develops volunteers to do the work that we have done for more than 150 years.

We don't wait for ministry assignments anymore. Now we tell ourselves what to do. We have found our niche. We are quiet yeast. We do our work. We provide service and advocacy for those who need it so that people will be able ultimately to serve themselves. And then become advocates for others.

We have found our place, most of us. We embrace and live the vision that taught and formed us. We have the heart and the energy for those who need it. We give freely.

People whom we taught and helped to form do move mountains and quiet raging seas these days. I say let us sit with them at our round tables as we together figure out the next steps needed for them “to change a world which yields most painfully to change” (Robert F. Kennedy). And just let me go to work in the not so early morning tomorrow to do my elderly best to be yeast for a few of those who hunger for nourishing bread in whatever form I can provide.



Sister Margaret Cessna, H.M., a sister of the Humility of Mary, is a writer from Cleveland and the author of *Home to Each Other*.





# AN OUTBURST

Lots of people you wouldn't expect are writing poetry these days, God bless them. After achievement on various other fronts, they are turning to word play. This seems true, for instance, of American women religious, as I could tell from their many entries to the Foley Poetry Contest at *America* magazine, where I was judge. Was it President Jimmy Carter who began a trend with his volume *Always a Reckoning, and Other Poems*, 1995, or did Carter just pick up something already in the air?

What in the world is impelling these late-life practitioners? I have some conjectures: the appeal of art, to begin with, admiration of the world around them, irritation at the world around them, reflection on the ways of God, moralizing for the masses, some mixture of the above. Poetry retreats can be sparking this interest, to say nothing of the urge for left-brain activity once the agenda eases up.

Anyone who takes up an art form in mid-life or after has to be conscious of all the achieved work that has gone before, all those craftsmen patiently at their last. Someone taking up poetry will have been short on study of the genre. He or she will thus be using some poetic structure picked up in school years ago, or some loose arrangement of lines on a page. One's formal resources may be a bit thin, but that need not hamper the feats of wit and imagination or the colorful handling of a scene that give a poem spice.

One clear value of poetry as a medium of expression is that, more than prose, it activates the music latent in language—rhyme and assonance and other echoing effects, and pauses, and patterns of stress, and the evocation of meaning from sound. Also, more than prose, it helps one leave a distinct thumbprint, a personal touch, on what one handles.

There will always be prosaic people, the meat-and-potatoes type, who will ask, Why poetry, anyway? The real answer, the

classical answer, is “for Beauty,” that special arrangement of things that pleases our contemplation. *The Song of Songs* in the Bible is unmistakably beautiful. It takes sexual attraction and romance as its subject, which made some of the Jewish elders squirm, but its scintillating treatment of *amor* in a sequence of lyric poems gained it full entry to the Bible, where it is taken as a love story between God and us. Wilfred Owen's poetry from the trenches of World War I, for its part, deals in ugliness. However, in concentrated language that makes the appalling truth vivid, Owen's poetry, like the *Iliad*, works some kind of magic upon brutality.

Theorists of poetry who were poets themselves, like Sir Philip Sidney in “An Apology for Poetry” and Percy Shelley in “A Defense of Poetry,” have described poetry as oriented to the ideal, showing not so much how things are as how they should be, how they are meant to be. Aristotle in the “Poetics” maintains that, whereas history relates what “has” happened, poetry relates what “may” happen. “Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history, for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular.” Aristotle was claiming that poetry (he was thinking about drama and epic) gives deeper insight into the real, how human beings are. Sir Philip Sidney gave Aristotle's argument a twist by claiming that poetry, with its eye toward the ideal, besides being so insightful, improves us. Proponents of Art for Art's Sake have dismissed Sidney out of hand, but most ordinary writers seem to agree with him.

If we are looking for the ideal, the beautiful in art, what could be more apt than the person and the teaching and the heroic sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ? He shines out as the very image of what humanity can be. He stands out in sharp contrast to the gray and the black, the ambiguity and the scandal, that so marks the pages of history, including that of





# OF POETS

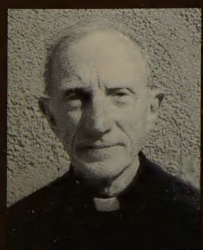
James Torrens, S.J.

the Church. We need only think of the radiant sculpture of Jesus outside the Cathedral of Chartres known as "le beau Dieu," The Beautiful God.

Peggy Rosenthal has shown abundantly, in her study *The Poets' Jesus*, Oxford University Press, 2000, how many, many poetic presentations we have of Jesus, from Saint Ephrem to the Franciscan poets and Hildegard of Bingen, through to T.S. Eliot and Rainer Maria Rilke and postmodernism. Rosenthal, for instance, ranging far afield, has a chapter "Crucified Africa: The Politicized Jesus of Africa and Beyond."

If anyone needs encouragement to venture into poetry and stick with it, what better stimulus could there be than Jesus Christ himself? Just listen to the parables, their inventiveness, their eloquence. They do not deliver their meaning immediately, but, like good poems, remain there to be chewed over and relished as they little by little deliver content. Our savior is a poet.

In the middle of "An Apology for Poetry," in an almost endless sentence, Sir Philip Sidney marshals all the arguments favorable to poetry. He concludes by reminding the reader: "the Holy Scripture (wherein there is no uncleanness) hath whole parts in it poetical, and even our Saviour Christ vouchsafed to use the flowers of it." So there!



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## JESUS THE POEM

**Sir Philip Sidney says  
prefer poets to historians,  
they put things in a better light.**

**Historians, captive, says he,  
to the truth of a foolish world,  
are a terror to well-doing.**

**Every generation there's war,  
the well-off tweaking the rules  
and wolfing the food supply.**

**If the bible be history,  
what a catalog of shame!  
Just dip into the Book of Kings.**

**But poetry brings us through.  
The Shaper reconfigures us,  
voila, into works of art.**

**Though hardness of heart hammer  
our Savior to the cross, the poem  
that is Jesus reverses history.**



# *Leadership From the Inside Out*

*A Leader of a Women's Religious Community Looks Back*

**Mary Navarre, O.P.**





At the end of the day, or in this case, at the end of 2,190 days serving on the leadership team of our congregation, I ask myself:

- What do I want to say from my perspective, my lens?
- What do I see that really matters both now and in the future?
- What meaning do I bring to this life, to our lives together?

## MY PERSPECTIVE

When I was first elected to leadership I noticed that people treated me with great courtesy. They opened doors for me and beckoned me to go ahead of them. They offered small services and sent cards and perhaps brought a gift of fresh flowers. I might have thought that I was important, but I soon realized I was not. I may have begun to think of myself as powerful, but soon knew I was not that either.

After the thank-you cards had been read and official papers signed, I began to tackle the job ahead. Some of it was difficult and unpopular. I got a lot of e-mails with advice, suggestions and innuendo. There were things I could not fix. There were people who had been deeply hurt. Some sisters held a grudge because of my role or because I reminded them of someone who caused them pain in the past.

For a relatively small enterprise, the complexity of a religious community is large. There is the congregation, the motherhouse, the health care center, the sisters off-campus, the corporation, the church, the neighborhood, the city, the state, the country and the world. All needed a slice of my time and attention.

Eventually I realized that all I had in the last analysis was my faith in a good and loving God, my hope in the goodness and faithfulness of each sister, my trust in colleagues on the team and my own integrity. I learned to say what I meant and to mean what I said, to zip my lips and pray, pray, pray in the midst of the mess, the suffering, the pettiness, the judgment and the misunderstandings. I prayed and told myself: do not judge, do not succumb to cynicism and do not be anxious. And most of all, think twice and once more before opening your mouth.

There were days when I felt like Job sitting on the dung heap—no friends, no power, no importance. So I just sat there on the pile of poop and said: Well, I'm doing the best I can. Then I remembered what God said to Job in a similar situation: "Where were you when I made the sun and stars?" And I thought to myself: "God, I had hoped for something a bit more consoling." But then I looked up at the stars and the full moon rising in the east, the same stars that shone over Bethlehem and the same moon that rose over Jerusalem. I felt the warmth of the sun and witnessed the beauty of the seasons and observed the Milky Way, put in place by the Creator billions of years ago along with trillions of galaxies. And I recalled Dante's words about who God is. When the pilgrim finally reaches the pinnacle of *Il Paradiso*, he hears: *l'amor / che move il sole / e l'altre stelle*. (God is the "love that moves the sun and other stars.")

I know that this is the same love that moved me to come down off the dung heap and go back to the table for another meeting on finance, organization, long-term planning, strategic planning, tactics, metrics and the alphabet soup of acronyms. I tried to remember the difference between a bond swap and a hedge fund; an EIN and a DBA. I swam in the alphabet soup of Medicare, Medicaid compliance rules, CeNAs and RNs, CPAP and COPD.

I learned to sit with the dying and walk with the living, to weep with the suffering and to laugh at the oddest times. I was privileged to witness a baby's birth in Peru and I returned home to bury the dead over and over again—sisters I had known since before the day I entered, colleagues and friends, my own blood sister, brothers. I sang the Salve and prayed that the angels would guide them into paradise; and I became aware of a new organ implanted in my body. Its name is grief and, if I might borrow an image from Aleksander Hemon, it daily secretes sorrow.\*

Then I went back to the prayer chair and sat. I hardly ever prayed in words. I just quieted my soul and listened for whispers, trying to catch a glimpse of the God I had come to know as the solace of my soul. And I was grateful.

I watched the rain fall, smiled at the flitting of the hummingbird at the feeder, saw the breeze move the trees in the distance until I felt that breeze on my cheek and knew that God was here in the whisper, in the glimpse and was grateful.

I realized that I came to help steer the ship for a while and in a few months I will leave the helm and return to the rower's bench. I have no idea anymore where the ship is headed, how close we are to shore, to the destination or an interim port. I know I am in good company on the boat. There are so many courageous shipmates who have gone before me and I look around and see many good companions on the journey now. The only direction that does not seem likely is to turn the ship 180 degrees around and go back to the shore we left so long ago. I look up and I look around and realize we are not the only ship on the sea. There are others on the horizon, in the distance, and some close by. And I am grateful.

It has been a transformative experience—these past years. I will never be the same. I will never again view our congregation or myself in the same way. I have come to understand both the holiness and the humanness of the congregation and myself in it.

## WHAT MATTERS?

Given this lens, what is it all about? We entered this congregation a long time ago; we came for all kinds of reasons. This way of life was an option and remains so. Yet our motives for choosing it are always mixed. Maybe it was a choice to get out of the house, to get an education, or to avoid marriage and bearing ten children. Maybe it was falling in love with God at first sight and a burning desire to do something difficult for God. Maybe it was a combination of all those things and still more. What matters now is why we stay. In his book *Catholics*, Brian Moore's abbot says to the investigator (these monks on a remote island were having their own apostolic visitation so to



speak), "We are all either monks or missionaries." We do not call ourselves missionaries or monks, yet in the wisdom of our foremothers, in our earliest constitutions we read, "we came to save our own souls and the souls of others." In our founder's vision we are called to be contemplative and to give to others the fruits of our contemplation. Whatever words we use to describe this call, the call is the same and it matters.

The reason why we stay matters.

For all of us who came and stayed, I believe there was and is a deep desire to seek the ineffable living God. This quest was and is so important to us that it requires our single-minded, single-hearted efforts. Sensing that our call was not for ourselves alone, we also came to serve others through the institution of religious life in this church. And so we embraced the evangelical counsels, a time-honored means to that end of service, and knowing in some prescient way that serving would not be easy we responded to the question asked at our profession "What do you ask?" with the words: "God's mercy and yours."

And this really matters—God's mercy and yours.

These have been tumultuous times. I suspect, though, that everyone who ever lived thought that their time was tumultuous. We adapt as humans, we adapt to the times in which we live. We are like the birds on wind-swept islands that learn how to safely nest in the gale-force winds of their homeland.

It matters that we have made our home in this gale-force wind.

It matters that we listen to each other and to the cries of those around us—especially the silent cries of the deeply wounded, the hungry, the poor, the despised. We need each other in this community. And as we become more and more connected as community—through e-mail, the Internet and conference calls, we know how much we need each other. And we also know that we need others beyond this community. We cannot do this alone. The word is collaboration. It means that we learn to negotiate, to sit at the table, to sit at many tables and figure out how to cooperate, and yes sometimes to compromise, so that everybody wins and nobody loses. And gradually we are learning that the table is getting larger and larger. The paradox is that while we are getting fewer in number, the table at which we sit gets larger and our companions multiply and are more diverse. What we do here in this place has repercussions for good or ill across our nation, across other nations, and across our home planet Earth.

It matters that we invite others to our table of plenty and that we join others at their tables.

It matters that we see and understand the connections, the interconnections. Monetary crashes in Greece, tsunamis in Japan, and earthquakes in Haiti affect the stock market in the U.S. and these affect our investments, which affect our revenue, which affect how much we have to eat, where we sleep and how we pay a living wage to our employees.

It matters that we see the interconnections everywhere—in the economy, politics, church and environment. It matters that we gather round our own campfire occasionally. We need to hug and laugh and renew acquaintances. We need to plan

and figure, talk and talk some more. We are the daughters of God; we make a difference. The homeless are housed, the poor are educated, the sorrowing are comforted, parishioners are served, prisoners are visited, nuclear proliferation is challenged, immigrants are welcomed, God is praised in song and prayer. We have made the world a better place; we leave a legacy of witness to Jesus, to the gospel of mercy and compassion, to the gospel of peace and non-violence. We witness to God's word, a word that contradicts meanness and greed, selfishness and ego. That's what really matters. And no, we won't succeed entirely, thus the need for mercy. And yes, we will give it our best try; yes, we will feel like Job on the dung heap sometimes; yes, God will reach down to console us, but not in the ways we would hope.

#### WHAT MEANING DO I BRING?

At times it is hard to bring meaning to bear on all of this. One is tempted to say like Dickens in the *Tale of Two Cities*: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times . . . it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair." But truly I think for us it is the season of gifting and midwifery.

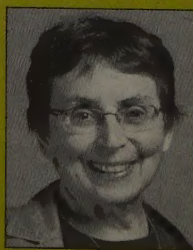
I believe it is time for us to remember and to celebrate our legacy. We have made a difference. We will continue to do so. Our lives have and will inspire others to seek the living God and to bring mercy and compassion to the world.

It is time for us to practice midwifery. Midwives wait in patient, but not passive, hope for the child to be born. They do not rush the birth, but when it begins they know what to do and they do it with skill, confidence and speed. Lives are at stake. There is little room for error.

We are mid-wifing a new use of our motherhouse grounds for the years to come, a place of beauty and care for our elders—both sisters and laity alike. We are helping to birth a legacy at our college to carry forth the fine tradition set in place by our foremothers.

We are birthing a new way of living a vowed life of contemplation and action, committed to the evangelical counsels in a quiet but firm contradiction to the drives for riches, sexual prowess, and power that hold so many in thrall. We are midwives of this uncertain future.

\*This image of an organ secreting sorrow is borrowed from a letter referring to an essay by Aleksander Hemon wherein he gives an account of his baby's death. His article, "The Aquarium" appeared in the June 13, 2011 issue of *The New Yorker*.



Sister Mary Navarre, O.P. completed a six-year term on the Leadership Team of the Dominican Sisters, Grand Rapids, MI on July 1, 2012. Prior to this she taught at Aquinas College in the departments of humanities and education. She is currently writing the second volume of the history of her congregation from 1966–2012.